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ABSTRACT

This handbook addresses the provision of an equitable basic education in rural areas, particularly in developing countries, by means of small schools located close to the pupils' homes. It is based on beliefs that small schools can be good schools; the appropriate place for a small school and its teachers is within the community; and small schools should make the most of the advantages that their size and location offer. Seven chapters address advantages in the small school; social structure of the small school; organization of learning in the multi-grade class; cooperation between parents, community, and school; local social and natural environments as resources for learning; strategies for curriculum planning; and professional support and cooperation within and between small schools. At the end of each chapter are suggested activities that call for observation, planning, and practical classroom action. Since situations vary from one classroom to another, and often within the same class and same subject, this handbook does not attempt to provide teachers with detailed prescriptions on how to handle day-to-day classroom challenges. Rather, by presenting ideas, raising questions, and suggesting fruitful routes to follow, sometimes supported by specific examples, teachers are encouraged to reflect upon their own situation, generate ideas, and initiate planning and action that fit their unique setting. (TD)

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MAKING SMALL SCHOOLS WORK

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS IN SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

ALAN SIGSWORTH AND KARL JAN SOLSTAD

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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CONTENTS

Foreword ..... *vi*
Preface ..... *vii*

Introduction 1

Chapter 1.
Making the Most of the Small School: First Thoughts 5

Chapter 2.
The Social Structure of the Small School 11

Chapter 3.
The Organisation of Learning in the Multi-grade Class 25

Chapter 4.
Parents, School and Community: Working Together 37

Chapter 5.
The Local Environment: A Resource for Learning 45

Chapter 6.
Strategies for Planning the Curriculum 55

Chapter 7.
Professional Support: Cooperation Within and Between Schools 67

FOREWORD

Not very long ago, many European countries faced the challenge of providing education for all. This led to many innovative approaches, for example the alternative day schooling utilised in many Scandinavian countries, where children went to school every second day, but teachers taught for six days a week. Another of the important strategies utilised in Europe, particularly for remote rural areas, was the multi-grade school. The typical multi-grade school in Norway or in Scotland was a one-teacher school where pupils in all the grades of primary schooling sat together in the same classroom. The highly skilled and dedicated teacher developed the skills to teach several grades successfully in one classroom! Today multi-grade classes continue to provide education in many remote rural areas in Europe.

Many developing countries face the same problem of children in remote rural areas finding it difficult to walk ten or more kilometres to a local school. This is a serious challenge in most African countries for example, where long distances make it impossible for young children to attend school. As a result many children start school at the age of ten, when they are big enough to walk such distances on their own. However starting school at such a late age creates serious problems. Most families require the labour of older children, so that from the age of eleven the majority of children have to assist in the family work on farms and in the house. Moreover parents are very hesitant to allow their young daughters to walk unaccompanied over long distances for fear of sexual harassment and even rape and abduction. The end result is that many children either attend school for only one or two years, or they do not attend school at all.

The multi-grade school located close to the children's homes offers a ready solution. Children do not have to walk ten kilometres to school. Nor do they need to face the dangers of sexual harassment and abduction. And they can contribute to the family's labour needs without disrupting their schooling.

However, are small multi-grade schools as good as large schools? This is the challenge we face. Alan Sigsworth and Karl Jan Solstad have devoted a lifetime to multi-grade schools, albeit in Europe rather than in Africa. What they have to offer in terms of professional and technical advice in this book is worthwhile.

The Norwegian Government has been supporting a pilot project for multi-grade schools in Ethiopia. The manual has been written within the context of this project. I expect this manual to serve a very useful purpose both in Africa and in other industrialised as well as developing countries.

Fay Chung
Director, UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA)
August 9, 2000

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PREFACE

The genesis of this book may be traced back to September 1996, when the authors participated as speakers in the Inter-Regional Workshop on Single-Teacher Schools and Multi-Grade Classes, held in Lillehammer, Norway, and jointly organised by the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO and the Norwegian Ministry of Education. Soon afterwards, we were asked to comment upon a partially completed draft of a handbook for teachers in small rural schools. That, together with the discussion in the Lillehammer Workshop, caused us to consider just what a *basic* handbook for a small multi-grade school should contain, and what it should be like, whether the school be in a remote area of an affluent European country or, especially with resources in mind, in some other remote area, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

The practical issues and concerns which are common to those who work in small rural schools, such as mixed-age teaching, multi-grade classroom organisation and school-community cooperation, shaped our selection of topics. The theme underlying all of its contents is that small schools and their community contexts contain potential advantages and assets, which can be harnessed and put to good educational use by skilful teachers.

Yet what should such a handbook be like? We decided that it should be concise, and consist of only seven chapters, each of which should be well illustrated with examples, and accompanied by activities within which readers could be able to develop ideas, to think critically and to note planning possibilities for their teaching. Whilst much of the presentation is drawn from teachers, pupils, community members and researchers in Norway and Britain, we have also been able to draw upon literature and school experience in Africa.

Alan Sigsworth prepared the draft versions of the Introduction and Chapters 1 to 4. Chapters 5 and 6 were substantially built from the material provided by Aasmund Gylseth, head teacher of a Norwegian multi-grade school, whilst Chapter 7 is based upon the contribution of Monica Meisfjordskar, a Norwegian regional adviser on school and teacher development. We are also indebted to Aasmund Gylseth for his critical help and suggestions during the compilation of this book and to Vigdis Bitustøyl Jacobsen for the drawings. Both she and Mr Gylseth have worked for NORAD in African countries.

The handbook is seen as part of the pilot phase of the UNESCO project *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Multi-grade Classes and Single-Teacher Schools*, run by the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) and financially supported by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

Small schools with multi-grade classes are uncommon in towns and cities. It is in the sparsely populated regions of countries that these schools are mostly to be found. This handbook has been written as an aid and resource for teachers who work in them.

Before outlining the form of the handbook, it may be worthwhile to indicate briefly how views of the educational contribution which small schools can make, have recently undergone a change.

When basic education for all was established in Europe and North America during the 18th and 19th centuries, large sections of the populations lived in rural areas where transport was poor or non-existent. Necessarily, schools had to be located were people lived and such schools tended to be small. This was particularly the case in countries with large sparsely populated areas such as Norway where, in addition, harsh winter conditions did not allow long walks between home and school. In the second half of the 20th century, many politicians and planners, especially those in countries with vastly improved transport facilities, became convinced that only large schools could provide really effective schooling. Commonly, their argument ran as follows: small schools disadvantage children because a small teaching staff cannot provide an adequate curriculum; teachers in remote areas must be professionally isolated, because they are far from urban in-service centres; multi-grade classes are harder to teach than single-grade classes; the children perform less well; they suffer socially, because their single-age peer groups are too small; it is costlier to educate children in small schools than it is in large ones.

Where this line of reasoning was accepted, many small communities saw their small schools closed and their children transported long distances to school. However, as the century was moving towards its end, and as the effects of school closures upon pupils and their communities became apparent, a much more positive view of small schools began to appear. We can illustrate this change with three examples.

First, the idea that the small school should be seen as a central element in the community was well expressed in Norwegian evidence presented to the Sparsely Populated Areas Project in 1981:

> *[Schools] should primarily be social milieu in which children can easily accommodate and develop, in close personal contact with teachers they know well and who are well integrated in the local community.*[1]

Second, the simple assumption that small schools are necessarily poorer, educationally, than large schools was challenged in a study by the United States National Institute of Education, which offered as its first conclusion:

> *'Good' schools and 'bad' schools (however defined) come in all sizes.... there is simply no basis for the belief that making a school bigger will automatically make it better*[2]

[1] Sher, J.P. (1981) *Rural Education in Urbanised Nations: Issues and Innovations.* (OECD/CERI Report). Boulder, Colorado, West View Press
[2] *op. cit.*

Third, with regard to the persistent emphasis of planners and politicians on the need to reduce the disadvantages of schools in remote areas, Darnell (1981), an Australian educator, argued that a more positive approach would be:

> *....to amplify as far as possible any educational advantage that might be derived from living far way from the urban and larger town centres.*[3]

This handbook shares those three views. Small schools can be good schools; the appropriate place for a small school and its teachers is within the community; small schools should make the most of the advantages which their size and location offer.

The purposes of the handbook are:

- To identify the positive features of the small school and its setting.
- To discuss briefly such features.
- To identify basic principles which can be used as starting points for developments within the school and community.
- To encourage the reader to generate ideas and to initiate planning and action.

To assist with these purposes, the discussion is interspersed with points at which the reader can pause to note ideas. In addition, there are suggested activities at the end of each chapter which call for observation, planning and practical classroom action. It will be very useful for the reader to have a notebook to hand in which to work through the activities, to jot down ideas and observations, as and when they occur, and to make planning notes. In this way, handbook and notebook can together constitute a resource for developmental possibilities and plans.

The young reader.

[3] Darnell, F. (1981) 'Equality and opportunity in rural education', in Darnell, F. and Simpson, P.M. (Eds) *Rural Education: In Pursuit of Excellence*, National Centre for Research on Rural Education, University of Western Australia.

7 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The chapter topics are:

- Identifying advantages in the small school.
- The social structure of the small school.
- The organisation of learning in the multi-grade class.
- Cooperation between parents, community and school.
- The local social and natural environments as resources for learning.
- Strategies for curriculum planning.
- Professional support and cooperation within and between small schools.

Perhaps the term 'handbook' may create an erroneous impression of what this book is about. Any educational setting is unique. Not only does the situation vary from the one classroom to another, but also from day to day in the same class and same subject. For reasons such as those, it is not possible to provide teachers with detailed prescriptions on how to handle day to day classroom challenges. This handbook makes no attempt to give such answers. Rather, by presenting ideas, raising questions and suggesting fruitful routes to follow, sometimes supported by specific examples, we hope to put the teachers of small rural schools in a better position to reflect upon their own situation and practice and to find solutions which harmonise with their unique setting.

In many developed countries modern information and communication technology (ICT) offers a wide range of opportunities for improving education generally. Certainly, it offers many possibilities for education in remote rural areas. We have not touched upon ICT related materials in this handbook for two reasons. First, even in rich developed countries such as the Scandinavian ones, these technologies, as applied to rural primary education, have not, as yet, been developed to any large extent (though important work is in progress). Second, and more importantly, the present handbook addresses itself to the situation and needs of rural education in developing countries, where teaching methods and strategies depending on huge investments are out of the question for many years to come. In our view, by concentrating on the basic issues of education in the circumstances of small units, long distances and scarce resources, we believe that most of the content of this book will be relevant for teachers in small schools, regardless of the kind of technology to which they have access.

Whilst the handbook is quite short, it does contain a wide range of activities. We suggest that, as a beginning, you familiarise yourself with its contents by reading the book right through. If you do that, you will be well placed to decide whether to work through the activities in the order in which they are presented, or to begin with one in which you have a special interest.

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CHAPTER ONE

MAKING THE MOST OF THE SMALL SCHOOL: FIRST THOUGHTS

In this chapter, we will examine four aspects of small multi-grade schools which their critics claim to be disadvantages, before going on to introduce a number of features of small schools which are central to improvement and development. We will return to them in the topics which form the remaining chapters. We begin with a puzzle.

> *In the past, there has tended to be a belief that small schools could not provide as good an education as [large schools].....[Recent] findings indicate that pupils in the schools with fewer than 100 pupils on roll, most of which are rural, achieve standards which are slightly higher than those achieved by pupils in the larger schools....Overall, the quality of learning tends to be slightly better in the small rather than the large schools...On a wide range of comparisons concerned with the quality of education provision, small schools are rated rather more favourably than larger ones*[1] .

This very positive view of the educational contribution which small schools can make is taken from a 1995 government document concerned with rural areas. Ten years before, the previous government, in a similar report, had observed that, 'it is inherently difficult for a small school to be educationally satisfactory.'[2] Here is the puzzle. How could the view of small schools have changed so much in ten years? Both governments had the same political outlook and, over the period, little had changed in the organisation, resource levels and staffing of the nation's schools. The answer lies in one important change. During the ten years, a new and much more comprehensive system of school inspections had been put to work and, for the first time, detailed information became available on all the nation's schools. For the first time, it was possible to compare the educational quality of large and small schools. Now, it seemed that, even if small schools possessed the disadvantages which politicians and educational planners had previously claimed, they must also have features which enabled them to provide an education at least as good as, if not better than, large schools.

With that puzzle solved, we will consider some of the features of small school which their critics cite as disadvantages. It is important to do this, because if a claimed disadvantage proves to be a *real* disadvantage, then the possibility exists that it can be eliminated or, at least, reduced.

[1] HMSO (1995) *Rural England*, London

[2] HMSO (1985) *Better Schools*, London

The Claimed Disadvantages of Small Schools

Teachers: Curriculum Coverage

It is surprising, but true, that even in countries where small schools predominate, the large town school is still seen as the ideal model against which small schools are compared. The most obvious difference between the large and small school is that of staff sizes. Surely, the argument goes, a small school of 2 or 3 teachers cannot hope to provide the same breadth and depth of curriculum as that provided by a staff of, say, 10 teachers.

There are two main points to think about here. If the teachers in small schools have had a sound schooling and an adequate professional training, they should be more than able to cope with the demands of the basic primary curriculum. Further, in large schools with single age-grade classes, it is common practice in many countries that the class teacher has his/her pupils for only one year. The teacher who works with a multi-grade class has contact with his/her pupils over two, three or four years. The extra knowledge which a teacher gains of the pupils over that longer period, upon which he/she can base their teaching of the curriculum, represents a considerable advantage.

Teachers: Professional Isolation

If teachers are unable to obtain advice and find it difficult to update their professional knowledge, it is likely that the education which they provide for their pupils will be less effective than it could be. There are two reasons why fears have been expressed that teachers in small schools may suffer professional isolation.

First, the size of the school may mean that they are the only teacher or, that there are only one or two colleagues with whom to exchange ideas and advice, unlike the situation in a large school, where there are more colleagues. Clearly, this represents a concern, but it does assume that all teachers in large schools take advantage of their situation. It may be the case, however, that where there are only two or three teachers in a school, they feel a greater need to make the most of each other's expertise and specialisms.

Second, teachers in small remote schools are often a long way from in-service provision such as colleges and teacher centres. When winter conditions are harsh, or when the rainy season arrives, it may be impossible for a teacher to travel even short distances to reach an in-service centre. Here, the matter of distance from formal in-service provision is a definite disadvantage. This isolating factor can only be overcome if the providers are able to take account of the circumstances of their small remote schools when planning appropriate forms of in-service education, including networking arrangements.

Multi-grade Classes

The claim that multi-grade classes are a disadvantage to pupil learning because such classes are harder to teach, is based upon the view that, for teaching to be effective, children must be grouped and taught in single age-grades. Where, within a multi-grade class, children are rigidly divided into single age-grades, say of 7-8, 8-9, 9-10, with each age-grade taught as if it were a single class, then the claim that multi-grade classes are harder to teach is valid. However, where teachers see those divisions as no more than one option among many for organising their work, the claim loses some of its force.

Critics of small schools also allege another disadvantage of multi-graded classes. This one centres upon the age imbalances which can occur in a multi-grade class where, at any one time, one or other of the age groups in the class may be under-represented. For example, the class may contain only a handful of eight year old children. Here, the critics would argue that, because the eight year olds are so few in number, their ability to work and compete with people of their own age is reduced, and, therefore, their social and intellectual development will suffer. Generally, those who cite the matter of age group imbalance believe that only in a large single age class can children have the chance to develop their intellectual and social potential to the full. Later in this book, we will argue that this criticism ignores the opportunities for these developments which the multi-graded class and, indeed the small school itself, can provide in the hands of imaginative teachers.

The Cost of Small Schools

Those responsible for providing a national system of schools have a duty not to waste taxpayers' money. It is usually the case, but not always, that the cost of a pupil's education in a large school is lower than the cost in a small school. Obviously, the greater cost of supporting a system of small schools can be seen as a disadvantage by those concerned with the funding of the whole education system.

There are two matters to think about here. First, where the provision of education in sparsely populated areas is by means of large schools, one consequence is that children must be transported, or they must walk long distances, to and from school. Not only is this tiring, especially for young children, but in some circumstances, it may actually be dangerous, with the result that parents become unwilling to let their children, especially their daughters, make the journey. As a consequence, many children fail to receive the education which is their right. The cost of providing small schools must be balanced against the need to make education accessible to every child, wherever they live, if equal access to education is to be a genuine national aim.

Small Schools: Making the Most of Them

The prime task for teachers in any school is to assess both the difficulties and the possibilities which their school and its setting present and then, to consider how to overcome the difficulties and how the best use can be made of the possibilities. For teachers in small schools, this task is *vital*. In the next part of the chapter, we will look briefly at a number of small school features which merit serious attention, if the small school is to provide a good education. We will then outline a number of principles which seem to underlie the work of teachers in successful small schools.

The Teacher

When a teacher goes to work in a small school, he/she soon realises that whatever resources the school has of books, buildings and equipment, he/she, along with perhaps one or two colleagues, represents the *only* trained professional resource. With that comes the realisation that if this resource is to be used to full effect, it cannot be deflected from the school's prime purpose, which is to maximise the learning possibilities for the children. A prime question then for any teacher who works alone in a single teacher school, or as a member of a very small staff, is: How can I make the greatest use of the learning time which the school day and week provide?

The Social Structure of the Small School

Because a small school *is* small, its characteristics are very different from those of a large school. Its staff is few in number; there is much less possibility of an organisational hierarchy and the need for teacher inter-dependence is much more evident. With regard to the pupils, a number of factors influence how they associate and form friendships across ages and gender in ways that are not commonly found in large single age-graded schools. The two most evident of these are the multi-graded nature of their classes and the small size of the total school pupil group. The nature of these relationships will be considered more fully in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to suggest that, when a teacher is able to harness the social structure of the pupil peer group to the routines of the class and school, the children can benefit socially and the work of the teacher can be supported. In effect, the teachers and pupils can cooperate in running the school.

Teachers and Curriculum Knowledge

Earlier, we argued that teachers in small schools should be able to teach the basic primary curriculum if their own schooling and professional training have been adequate. That, however, does not mean that they have a monopoly on curriculum knowledge. Some people outside the school may possess school knowledge, whilst all will have local knowledge. Brought inside the school, such people can support and enrich the teacher's work, often enabling the pupils to link their curriculum knowledge to the world they know outside school.

School and Community

Even when a small school is situated in the middle of a village, it may be no more than an outpost of the national education system. Villagers may see it simply as *the* school. A school in a village can become more than that, when the teacher encourages the parents and other community members to come into the school and contribute their skill and knowledge to its work. When, additionally, teachers, pupils and community members come together to develop educative ventures, e.g. in some form of community improvement, then people begin to talk of *our* school. Put another way, the school becomes *the school of the community.*

Achieving professional support

Teachers in small schools in remote areas, as we noted earlier, often experience difficulties in reaching in-service centres. Sometimes even when they are able to do so, they find that the course, or programme, is geared much more to the requirements of teachers in large schools than it is to their circumstances. Problems like this often stimulate teachers in small schools to seek alternative ways of developing their professional understanding and skills.

Commonly the teachers in good small schools act as sources of ideas to each other and sometimes, they are able to widen their professional circle by developing cooperative contacts with other nearby small schools. By this means, they can exchange ideas, seek advice and plan curriculum together. Very often, this proves advantageous, for such meetings can often be more relevant to their needs than are distant courses. This matter of gaining professional support will be developed in Chapter Seven.

Putting the Advantages to Work: A Suggested Set of Working Principles

It is important for the teacher in the small school to identify the advantages and to make the most of

them. Here, we have briefly considered some of them and they will figure again in the following chapters. We close this chapter with a set of working principles which seem to underlie the way successful teachers work in their small schools. Please reflect upon them and add others which you consider to be important when thinking about, planning and teaching in the small school.

- All small schools possess advantages as well as disadvantages. Each small school possesses particular advantages: *all these advantages should be identified and used as developmental starting points.*
- Teacher time in a small school is the school's most precious commodity: *it should not be dissipated on non-teaching activity.*
- The social structure of the small school has distinctive features: *these features should be harnessed to organisational, administrative, teaching and learning tasks.*
- The small school has too few people (teachers and pupils) to divide its activities on the basis of gender: *schools should be gender-free places.*
- The teacher does not have a monopoly on knowledge: *lay people with both formal and local knowledge should be drawn into the educational task.*
- School and community can generate mutually educative activity: *practical action involving both school and community should be pursued.*
- Cooperation with similar like-minded schools is valuable: *schools should develop forms of contact by whatever means possible in order to exchange ideas, expertise and advice.*

An old primary school. Zambia.

13 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In this chapter we first considered several aspects of small multi-grade schools which their critics regard as educationally disadvantaging. Then we went on to comment briefly on several features of these schools which are crucial factors in their development and improvement. We concluded the chapter by presenting a set of principles which are apparent in the work of good small schools. The activities which follow invite you to think generally about the small multi-grade school as an element in the provision of schooling in your country. More specifically, you are invited to reflect upon the characteristics of your school and to consider the suggested principles.

Suggested Activities

1. The general situation and the place of the small school in your region's educational provision
Imagine that you are writing to someone who has never visited your region. Describe briefly for them what it is like in terms of its geography, climate, economy and general way of life.

With regard to your region, what would you see as the advantages and disadvantages of providing education by means of large schools with single age-graded classes?

In what kinds of situation in your region does the small multi-grade school have a role to play in solving the problem of children's access to education? What do you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of using small schools to deal with this problem?

2. Your School
Describe briefly the area which your school serves, e.g. physical characteristics, occupations, communications, way of life.

Note those features of your school which you think constitute its main advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of (i) you as a teacher, (ii) the pupils and (iii) the parents and community.

3. Thinking about Working Principles
An educational principle is an expression of a belief or value by which we shape our practice and against which we judge our performance. Think about the seven principles outlined in the chapter in relation to your practice and experience. Which of them underlie your work? Which of them do you think is the hardest, or would be the hardest, to implement in your school? Why is that so?

Which other principles do you apply to your own professional practice?

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE SMALL SCHOOL: TEACHERS AND PUPILS WORKING TOGETHER

When teachers and children go to school in a morning, they enter a physical structure, the school. As they do so, they take on their different roles of head teacher, teacher and pupil and so form the social structure of the school. The intention in this chapter is to examine the social structure of the small multi-grade school and the relationships which form within it. We will also attempt to illustrate how good use may be made of the possibilities which they contain.

The Concept of Social Structure

The social structure of any organised form of human activity - a hospital, a factory, a church - can be thought of as a number of layers, containing people with specific roles and degrees of authority. If we think of a large primary school, we can imagine it as having at least four layers. In the topmost layer is the head teacher, answerable to the national, regional and local governments for the effective oversight of finance, administration, curriculum, staffing and the well-being of the school. In the next layer are deputy head teachers and senior teachers, perhaps with responsibility for overseeing aspects of the curriculum or pupil welfare. Forming the third layer are the class teachers, each with responsibility for their class. In the lowest level are the pupils, some of whom may have duties as class monitors and school prefects.

This picture of the social structure of the school is, of course, over-simplified. It could imply that the social structure of the school is as rigid as its physical structure. That would be wrong, for what makes any school distinctive, is how the people who occupy those layers and positions interpret their roles and actively try to fulfil, or change them. Moreover, the social structure may not be as solid as it seems. A head teacher, for example, may choose to do some class teaching in order to gain a better feel of how the school works. At classroom level, teachers may demand, and gain, participation in school decisions. The social structure of a school is not set in stone.

The Social Structure of the Small School

A frequently made comment on small multi-grade schools, is that they have more resemblance to an extended family than they have to a large school. Certainly, that comparison strengthens when we think of the smallest of small schools, the single teacher school. Here is the simplest social structure in the education system - a teacher and his/her class. Yet that simplicity is deceptive for, paradoxically, the role of the head teacher in such a school is, in some ways, broader and more complex than that of the head teacher of a large school. Unsupported by other staff, the head teacher of a single teacher school must carry the same binding duties as the head teacher of a large school, whilst embracing the role of a full-time, multi-grade, class teacher.

In the two or three teacher school, the social structure is different again. Here, too, the head teacher is a full-time classroom practitioner. Because of this, the authority structure is less clear than that in a large school. On the one hand, the head teacher has the official authority of his/her

position as school leader, whilst on the other hand, his/her authority as a class teacher practitioner is determined in the eyes of the other teacher(s) and the pupils by his/her professional performance in the classroom. Authority, in these circumstances, is not a given. It is something to be achieved.

The joint role of head teacher/class teacher in a multi-grade school with a small staff can pose problems, not only for the head teacher, but also for the other teachers. For example, if the head teacher places emphasis upon the head teacher part of his/her role at the expense of his/her practitioner role, the other teachers may react by emphasising the boundaries of their role and confining their contribution to their own classroom.

The issue of relationships between teachers and head teacher is not, of course, relevant to the single teacher school. So far as the two or three teacher school is concerned, it is possible to suggest that the interpretation of their roles by head teachers and teachers in small schools poses a number of dilemmas for them. We have set out several of these, as seen from the head teacher's perspective:

- I have so many other tasks to do, I feel that my teaching may be suffering. Could I pass some of these duties to the class teacher(s)?

- If I did pass on some of these duties, would the other teachers, or maybe the parents, begin to think that I was not really behaving as a proper head teacher? What effect would that have?

- If the class teacher(s) were to take on some of the responsibilities, how could I help them in return with their main responsibility - teaching and learning in their class?

- If the children see the other teacher(s) doing parts of my job, would I lose some of my authority as the head teacher?

To what extent do dilemmas like these strike a chord in your professional experience? Which other elements of your role contain conflicting aspects. Make brief notes of them.

We will consider head teacher and class teacher roles and relationships in the small school again, later in the book. Now, we turn to that other element in the social structure of the small school – the pupil.

Although pupils do not have a paid position in the school's social structure, they nevertheless represent a significant part of it. In exploring the characteristics of the relationships which pupils develop with each other in school, we will be using the term 'peer group' which, in everyday language, is used to mean a group of people of roughly the same age and status who share similar interests. We begin by examining children's relationships in large schools.

Pupil Peer Group Relationships in Large Single-Age Graded Schools

When young children are assembled into a class on their first day at school, the likelihood is that they will stay together in that class right through their primary years. Over that time they will share the same classroom, play in the same playground and experience the same teachers. School is a very long, intense and confined social experience for children, and it would be surprising if it did not have a powerful shaping effect upon the relationships which they develop during their primary school days.

The study of pupil relationships in school has been undertaken almost entirely in large town schools, those with one or more classes to an age-grade. The patterns of pupil peer group relationships which such studies reveal are consistent. Almost without exception, children in the classes of age-graded schools confine their friendships to members of their own class. Blyth and Derricott (1977) observe:[1]

> *...in school with its age-graded organisation....all the children earn their annual increment of status.... Because of their close association with the school as an organisation, the children's informal relationships mirror the formal organisational structure substantially....* (p79)

Meyenn (1980), in his study of pupil relations in a large, age-graded school for 9-13 year old children, confirmed the effect of school organisation on pupil relationships, also pointing out that, within a class, two single gender peer groups can co-exist:[2]

> *[The boys'] lives remained within the bounds of their class group and boys in other classes were classed almost as strangers.... The two most obvious features of these pupil peer networks were that they were formed largely within class boundaries and were almost entirely of the same gender....there tended to be little interaction between the boys and girls.* (p275)

These studies were conducted almost twenty-five years ago in English schools. A recent Norwegian study by Kvalsund (1999) confirms their conclusions.[3] We can summarise the effect of age-grading in large schools upon pupil relationships as follows: *pupils form their relationships almost completely within their class group, creating gender peer groups which are virtually independent of each other. The level of peer contact between classes is low.*

[1] Blyth, W.A.L. & Derricott, R. (1977) *The Social Significance of Middle Schools*, Batsford.

[2] Meyenn, R.J. (1980) 'Peer networks among middle school pupils' in Hargreaves, A and Tickle, L (Eds) *Middle Schools: Origins, Ideology and Practice*, *Harper and Row*

[3] Kvalsund, R. (1999) *Qualities of informal learning in smaller and bigger rural schools in Norway*, paper presented at the Interskola Conference, August 1999, Ba, Norway.

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Children's Peer Groups in Small Multi-Graded Schools.

In a small school which consists of one or more multi-graded classes, each class obviously contains more than one age group. It follows that children will spend longer than one year in their class and, therefore, will be in close daily contact with children different in age from their own. Moreover, the composition of their class will change slowly year by year. For example, in a multi-grade class containing four age grades, the oldest group will pass on to the next class at the end of the school year and a new, young age group will join and be gradually assimilated into the class structure. Whilst children of the same age in a multi-grade class will have an identity as a recognisable group, they will also have greater opportunities to form relationships with children in other age groups than will children who pass through school in a single age graded class. There are two other aspects to the formation of relationships in schools with two or more multi-graded classes:

- As an age group moves from one multi-grade class to the next, its members develop new relationships in their new class whilst retaining their contacts with the children in the class they have left. In other words, their relationships form bridges across class boundaries.
- In small schools, where children wish to engage in activities which call for more people than their own age group contains, they are impelled to draw in children older or younger than they

Teaching one group. What about the others?

are. Such a need also works against the development of the gender boundary commonly found in larger schools, thus extending the network of relationships.

It is not surprising that studies of children's peer groups in small schools such as those of Bell and Sigsworth (1987)[4] and Kvalsund[5] reveal very different patterns of pupil relationships from those in large schools. The chief features of pupil relationships in small multi-grade schools are:

- In a multi-grade *class*, children develop relationships within their own age grade, but they extend those relationships into the other age grades as well.
- Within the multi-grade *class* and the *school*, the barrier between the genders is less strong than in large single age graded schools. Boys and girls seem prepared to cooperate if the task demands it.
- When the whole school combines in an activity in the classroom and in the playground, it is evident that children's relationships extend across the age range of the school. Friendship groups have a much wider age span than those in larger schools.

On this basis, we can observe that the different patterns of pupil relationships in multi-grade schools - within and across classes and between age and gender groups - create a distinctive kind of peer group. Whilst the children's relationships *in* their class provide them with a sense of age identity - of where they are in the school - it is their relationships *across* the school which creates their sense of identity within the school peer group.

Clearly, the school peer group can either be an asset or a deficit, depending upon how it lines up with the purposes of the school. Any teacher who wins the allegiance of his/her class peer group has gained a precious asset. In the small multi-grade school, gaining the allegiance of its extended peer group represents a treasure beyond price.

A Mid-Point Pause

It may be valuable for you to pause for a few minutes and to note down any connections which you have made between the account of pupil peer group relations which you have just read and the characteristics of the pupil peer group in your school.

In the rest of this chapter, we will attempt to illustrate how the nature of a multi-grade peer group can be an advantage to the teacher. We begin by recalling the first principle which we set down in Chapter 1, namely that all the advantages in the small school situation 'should be identified and used as developmental starting points'. Given the circumstances of the solitary teacher in a single teacher school, there often seems to be very little which could be called an advantage. As we have noted before, the teacher in that situation is the sole professional resource which can be employed in the organisation of the children's learning across the entire curriculum. Such a precious resource, like water in the desert, must be conserved and used to maximum effect. That priority underlies the second principle which we listed:

[4] Bell, A & Sigsworth, A (1987) *The Small Rural School: A Matter of Quality*, Falmer, London.
[5] *op. cit.*

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> Teacher time in a small school is the school's most precious commodity: *it should not be dissipated on non-teaching activity.*

Put another way, we could state that teacher time should be focussed entirely on fostering pupils' learning. If we aim to base small school practice upon that principle, the best point at which to begin is an examination of how time is used in school, for whilst governments may lay down how many hours per day children are to be in school, there is no guarantee that all of those hours will be spent effectively on learning pursuits.

The Use of Time in School

Harrison (1990)[6] studied the use of classroom time in a number of multi-grade classes in small English schools. The daily time-tabled time she termed Classroom Time. She defined as Settling Time the time spent at the beginning of each session (at the start of school and after the morning, midday and afternoon breaks) in organising pupils, distributing materials, etc., before work commenced. The time which remained, when Settling Time was subtracted from Classroom Time, she labelled Teaching Time - the time in which the teacher and pupils engage in purposive learning activities. She found that, in a four session day, Settling Time could range from 5 - 15 minutes per session. In other words, up to one hour per day could be lost from Teaching Time. She noted other factors which reduced Teaching Time, e.g. Waiting Time, when individuals and groups must wait for assistance and also Distraction Time, when time is lost because children's attention is drawn away from their task.

Loss of time from causes like these is a feature of classroom life generally. The nature of a multi-grade class makes the problem more cogent, because the several age grades composing the class are likely to make separate demands in relation to settling and waiting time. For example, if the daily loss of time from Settling and Waiting Times amounted to an hour per day in a multi-grade class of four age groups, then over the four year period spent in the class, each pupil would lose the equivalent of around thirty school weeks of Teaching Time. One means of reducing the loss of Teaching Time is through the involvement of the peer group.

Involving the peer group

Although there is only one professional leader in a single teacher school, other leaders are present. When the teacher is able to draw them and their peers into the running of the school, a major asset of the small school is realised and teacher time can be conserved. Almost all teachers involve some members of their class - those they regard as most responsible - in the routine, non-teaching tasks which school life entails. Where the teacher is skilful enough to involve all the peer group, he/she not only draws in a major form of assistance, for the corporate life of the school is also strengthened. The head teacher of a single teacher Scottish primary school exemplified that kind of involvement in the running of her school when she declared, 'I organise my children so that the only thing I have to do is teach.' Every child in the school, from oldest to youngest, had responsibilities - domestic, organisational, and administrative, so that she, as the sole professional resource, could use her 'Time in Class' as fully as possible. Moreover, the way the children were organised meant that older

[6] Harrison, C. (1990) 'School time in the primary school' in, Galton, M and Patrick, H. (Eds) *Curriculum Provision in the Small Primary School*, Routledge, London

children inducted younger children into tasks which the latter would eventually inherit. Inasmuch as she fully involved the peer group in the running of the school and did not discriminate between boys and girls, her approach illustrates two other principles which we noted earlier:

- The social structure of the small school has distinctive features: *these features should be harnessed to organisational, administrative, teaching and learning tasks.*
- The small school has too few people (teachers and pupils) to divide its activities on the basis of gender: *schools should be gender-free places.*

Is your use of pupils like that of the Scottish teacher? Rest for a moment and jot down (a) four or five classroom tasks which your pupils presently undertake and (b), four or five of your other non-teaching tasks which would be possible for them to undertake.

Whether the school is a single-teacher school, or one of several multi-grade classes, the two principles set out above provide major ways of enabling the teacher(s) to increase the time available to implement learning. Yet how might a teacher set about fully involving the peer group in the running of the school?

There are three elements to consider:

- The teacher must undertake a detailed and systematic appraisal of all the tasks which are essential to the smooth running of the school. This appraisal can be carried out by the teacher alone, but if it is shared with the pupils, then it is likely that a more detailed task inventory will result. If the appraisal is spread over one or two weeks, it will also be more comprehensive.
- Although teachers can usually nominate peer group leaders, they are often less sure how those leaders relate to one another and how far the affiliations of other peer group members extend. A period of quiet observation both in the classroom and outside will often yield a good deal of information about the structure of the overall peer group, its leader and its sub-groups.
- Any kind of change in social arrangements brings disturbance. If the decision is taken to give the members of the peer group more school responsibility than they have previously experienced, then the extension of responsibility should be gradual, beginning perhaps with one area. The improvement of Settling Time might be a suitable place to start.

Settling time

Settling Time, as we noted, is that time, short or long, at the beginning of any session before work begins. If Teaching Time is to be conserved, then Settling Time must be as brief as possible. The problem of achieving that end can be presented as a direct problem for the class to consider. It can even be given a title: *The Quick Start Project.* There are three features to think about and plan:

- The physical requirements, e.g. the room arrangements, and material and equipment requirements which differ from session to session.
- How responsibilities are to be allocated.
- Any rules which should be made. For example, many schools follow the rule that the classroom should be prepared and the groups given a first briefing at the end of the previous session, so that entry into the next session can be rapidly achieved.

Pupil involvement in planning the general organisation of the classroom can be valuable. The pupils, after all, experience their work place differently from the teacher and they know, or believe they know, how arrangements - of books, writing materials, tables, benches, equipment, the playground - could be improved. The changes which they suggest may, or may not, work, but if they see that their suggestions are taken seriously and tried out, their future commitment will be all the greater.

Waiting Time

One of the most difficult and persistent problems for the teacher of a multi-grade class is that of distributing their time between the different groups. It is inevitable that some pupils who have been set to work independently, will finish their work early, or be held up because they need the assistance of the teacher. Necessarily, they must wait. Whether that waiting time is wasted time, or productive time, depends upon the extent to which classroom arrangements enable children to fill it usefully. The reasons why children spend time waiting are many. The commonest are:

1. The nature of the task is not fully understood.
2. The task is understood, but there is uncertainty how far to proceed.
3. The children are not sure which resources they can use without permission.
4. Individual pupils or the group lack the skills and knowledge to work independently.
5. The task has been completed and the children do not know what to do next.
6. The classroom has insufficient resources for the children to occupy themselves, when they have completed a task, or whilst waiting for advice or help.

We can consider these in order:

1 & 2. The task is not fully understood. There is uncertainty how far to proceed.

Even though the teacher has given a full explanation of the task and its extent, and has provided written instructions on the chalkboard, some children will remain unclear. Here, it is important to ensure that peer group leaders in the group understand the remit of the task, so that they can act as teacher substitutes *and that the other members of the group know to whom they may turn for help.* Where a group is too immature for any of its members to function as leader, then it is important that they are made aware of which senior pupils they can approach, if the teacher is occupied.

3. The children are unsure which resources they can use without permission.

Here, the organisation of resources is important and, it is an area where involvement of the peer group is valuable. For example the classroom resources, (e.g. books, writing materials and equipment) can be categorised on a 'with/without' permission basis. Their arrangement in the classroom, responsibility for their care and rules for their use can be worked out by teacher and children together.

Waiting time.

4. Individuals lack the skills necessary to work independently.
Children require training in the skills which they will need in order to pursue activities without teacher supervision. For example:

- How to read a set of instructions and follow them in sequence.
- How to use the alphabetical index of a book.
- How to scan and interpret a diagrammatic representation.
- How to measure to an accuracy of .....

Often it is assumed that children can simply pick up such skills as they go along. Yet if they are systematically taught as part of the school curriculum, then children can become effective independent learners.

5. The task has been completed and the children do not know what to do next.
Very commonly, teachers set down rules for pupils to follow if they have finished what they are doing and are unsure what they should do next. For example:
Work on any other task which you have not finished.
Read a book.

Whilst both these time fillers may be profitable, there are other activities which children can undertake, as they wait for other children to complete their work, or for the teacher to come to them. Waiting time can be used by individuals to practise skills and to reinforce their grasp of such things as word recognition, multiplication tables and number bonds. Independent practice, of course, depends upon easy access to material and equipment, a matter which we examine next.

6. The classroom has insufficient resources for the children to use whilst waiting for advice and help.
Where the classroom is adequately stocked with books and other materials, then, as we have said,

it is necessary to clarify when, and how they may be independently used. When resources are very few, the problem of their scarcity is one which can be usefully shared with the pupils, with a view to the pupils and the teacher creating their own. In such a venture, costs can be minimal, for many resources can be made with waste cardboard, paper, paste, pens and simple art materials. Here are some examples:

Reading Materials:
Cards measuring 6cm x 6cm, can be used to create letter recognition cards. Sets of the cards can also be used for word building. Similar cards (flash cards) measuring 4cm x 12cm can be used to make individual word recognition cards. To help beginning readers, the basic three hundred words of the national and local languages can be printed on individual cards. They can be used for both word recognition and building simple sentences. (Tip: Cut the top left hand corner off each card so that, when formed in a pack, all the cards face the same way up.)

In order to augment reading materials, short stories, restricted to basic vocabulary, can be created, printed, illustrated and pasted to cards. Longer stories can be formed into card books. Here, children with talents for creating stories, drawing pictures, and printing can cooperate in their production. Resources made in this way can be made available on a 'spare time' shelf. Try listing some other reading and spelling activities which could be made by children in your school.

Mathematical Materials.
As with letter recognition cards, so it is possible to make number recognition cards for the younger children to use. Flash cards can be made for spare time learning and practising mathematical facts. Packs of number bond cards, e.g. addition up to twenty, can be made with the sum on one side (7 + 2 =) and the answer (9) on the other. Packs of multiplication cards can be made in the same way. List other spare time mathematics practice cards which these examples suggest to you.

Materials like those we have described can absorb time which would otherwise be wasted. Additionally, where supplies of them are adequate, they can form the basis of group practice periods which parallel the time when the teacher is working with other groups. If the children's inventiveness is encouraged, they can create games involving the use of materials such as number bond and multiplication cards.

We have offered only a few illustrative examples, because generating ideas and making resources for spare time activities and, indeed, classroom resources generally, represent valuable learning experiences in their own right. The old precept that, when you teach somebody something, you understand it better yourself, applies equally to creating learning materials. Jot down your own ideas on additional teaching materials that teacher and pupils could use.

Conclusion. Fulfilling a Social Aim.
There is one further observation to make. The educational aims of national governments almost universally include one aim which stresses the need for children both to understand the duties, responsibilities, obligations and rights of a member of society and to become participant

members in their community. In many schools, the attempt to realise that aim is made through formal lessons in Citizenship.

The small multi-graded school is well placed to practise this aim. Where teacher and peer group together participate in decision-making and cooperate in the wide range of tasks, which the school as an educational enterprise entails, then all learn *through experience*, what duties, responsibilities, obligations and rights actually mean and what it is to participate in a community. Put another way, in the small school, the development of responsible and responsive citizens need not be a matter of grasping a theoretical understanding, for that understanding can grow out of shared action.

Suggested Activities

1. *Studying Pupil Relationships*

This activity is concerned with developing the casual day to day observations which teachers make of their pupils into a more systematic study. A good way to begin is to set aside a section of your notebook and to make a list of the pupils, allowing four or five lines for each of them. Such a list is useful not only for noting the skills, abilities, talents and progress of individual pupils, but also the particular friendships and working relationships which they develop. As well as spreading your observations across playground, classroom and out of school activities, they need to be regarded as a continuing cumulative process.

The record which your study will develop will come to represent a professional resource from which you will be able to draw for a variety of purposes, including meetings with parents.

2. *Saving Teacher Time - be like the Scottish Headteacher*

If pupils are to take responsibility for as many non-teaching tasks as possible in order to save teacher time, the step by step approach which the Scottish headteacher used is one worth following:

(i) All the non-teaching task and duties were identified and listed, including the teacher's administrative and clerical responsibilities.
(ii) The requirements of each task were determined, e.g. what the task entailed, when it was required and how many people it needed - one, two, a group.
(iii) The children were selected to undertake specific tasks on the basis of their skills, level of maturity and relationships with co-workers.
(iv) With unfamiliar tasks, e.g. minor clerical duties, the selected pupils were trained.
(v) Because children need to know the limits of their assigned task, rules were established.
(vi) For particular tasks, pairings of an older and younger children were deliberately adopted, so that the task could be handed on.
(vii) The change was implemented gradually, task by task, to avoid uncertainty and confusion.

It is possible for the business of identifying and listing tasks to be made into a small project for a group of children. In class discussion, the children can be encouraged to offer suggestions, e.g. in the matter of forming rules, and solving the problems of Settling Time and Waiting Time. Involvement of this kind is likely to enhance their commitment to the ensuing changes in classroom routine.

3. *Training children to work independently*

We noted that time can be wasted when children lack the skills to work independently and so must wait for teacher assistance. If you select this problem as an area for improvement, the following six steps are good ones to take:

(i) Observe and record the difficulties which the children encounter when working on an independent task.
(ii) Note the incidence of such difficulties within age and ability levels.
(iii) Order the necessary skills which these difficulties indicate, from simple to complex.
(iv) Determine the age/ability levels at which they should be taught.
(v) Create activities which can be used in teaching the skills and for practising them.
(vi) Identify pupils who already possess the skills and are capable of assisting others to acquire them.

4. *Creating materials for practice and spare time activities*

Several examples were provided in the chapter of resource materials which children are capable of producing in the classroom for use in practice periods, whilst waiting for assistance and in their spare time. In this activity, there are fire elements:

(i) Gathering a range of materials , e.g. pieces of cardboard, buttons, pebbles, paste/glue string, paint, pictures to cut out.
(ii) Identifying children who have the necessary talents to produce the materials, e.g. those with good craft, art and writing skills.
(iii) Setting them to work to make one or two resources so that they 'get the idea'.
(iv) Involving them in developing ideas for other resources e.g. designing and making simple 'local' reading books for younger pupils, and devising ways of using particular resources, e.g. inventing mathematical practice games for use by individuals, pairs and groups.
(v) Establishing rules for their use in the classroom,

CHAPTER THREE

THE ORGANISATION OF LEARNING IN THE MULTI-GRADE CLASS

> *In a small [rural] school .... with one teacher, the pupils are grouped for different branches of the curriculum. The teacher makes full use of the individual effort on the part of the children by training them from the very beginning to work for themselves and by allowing them to work at their own pace .... [They] are allowed irrespective of age to proceed to other more advanced work as soon as they can show their competency.*[1]

This commendation of a teacher's approach to work with her multi-grade class was made three quarters of a century ago. Clearly, she believed that children should take responsibility for their own learning and organised her teaching on that principle. She was obviously a person who had responded to her circumstances by pioneering methods and forms of organisation which would make the most of her multi-grade situation. We must add in the fact that, although the age range of her class was from five to fourteen years, it contained, on average, only twelve children. The teachers of present day, large, multi-grade classes unquestionably face much greater challenges and difficulties than our 'long ago' teacher. Yet, like her, if they are to get the best out of their pupils, they, too, must assess their situation, develop appropriate organisation and be imaginative in the methods they employ. The purpose of this chapter is to present and explore a number of ways of organising teaching and learning in the multi-grade class and the classroom itself. We will begin by considering the principal methods which are appropriate to the multi-grade class.

Whole class teaching.

The wide age and attainment levels in a multi-grade class mean that, whilst whole class teaching has a place amongst the teacher's methods, its employment is necessarily more restricted than in a single age grade class. It does however have its uses:

- Whole class briefings are valuable at the beginning of the school day and the commencement of a session, so that everyone is made aware of what the different activities will be, what they are to do, when the teacher will, or will not, be available, which children may be approached for help, which spare time activities can be undertaken on task completion and so on. Backed up by a blackboard summary, such briefings can save a good deal of pupil and teacher time and confusion.

[1] Hadow Report (1931) *Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School*, HMSO p81-82.

- When a class is engaged on a project in which groups or age grades are studying different, but associated, topics, the teacher can use whole class teaching to enable the children to see how their work relates to the overall task. In a similar way, the teacher can use whole class teaching to cover those aspects of the project for which classroom resources are inadequate, for example, by demonstrating an experiment which children cannot undertake because there is insufficient equipment.
- Some aspects of curriculum lend themselves to whole class teaching, for example, drama, story telling, poetry and music (especially singing). Here, it is very important to build up a large repertoire of material, e.g. stories and songs, so that the three or four year cycle of the class is adequately covered.

In a multi-grade class, especially when whole class teaching is used for instructional purposes, its duration *must* take account of the attention span of the youngest children and hence, it must be brief and clear in its intentions. Whilst whole class teaching in a multi-grade class can never be a main method, it is valuable, not only for the purposes already mentioned, but because it can give a sense of purpose and 'whole class' solidarity.

Group Work

The organisation of the multi-grade class into groups creates a number of advantages. First and foremost, it overcomes the problem of teaching a class wide in age and attainment as a single unit and it allows the teacher to distribute his/her time effectively between the different age groups. Where resources are not plentiful, group working also ensures that the best use is made of available resources. Moreover, membership of a small group carries distinct benefits for the pupils. Not only do they have greater responsibility for their own learning, but there are also more opportunities for them to experience leadership and cooperative working than there are in whole class instruction. Within the smaller unit of the group, children are also more free to present their ideas and to discuss those of others. All of these benefits are achievable, but only if groups are effectively organised.

There are a number of crucially important factors to be taken into account if group work, as a method of learning, is to be successful. These are:

- *Clarity.* If a group is to work independently for a period of time, its members must be clear about the purpose and the extent of the task.
- *Resources.* The materials which the group is to use must be adequate and the members must be sure which additional resources they can obtain without requiring the teacher's permission.
- *Leadership and Assistance.* Group members need to know to whom they may turn for help when the teacher is engaged elsewhere. This means that the members must have a leader whom both they and the teacher respect. Such leadership needs to be facilitating, not dominating. If help and advice within the group is not sufficient, the group must know which of the other class members they can approach.
- *Task completion.* It is difficult to synchronise the work of different groups. Often, children in an unsupervised group finish their work ahead of the group with whom the teacher is working. As we noted in Chapter 2, children who have completed their task must know how they may use the remaining lesson time, e.g. for reading, completing other work, practice activities and pursuing personal study.
- *Self monitoring.* Often, children in an unsupervised group come to a halt because they have completed a task which needs marking. Some tasks lend themselves to self marking, if marking keys are available, e.g. when using mathematics work cards. There are, of course, always teacher fears that self marking may lead to cheating. However, if a system of periodic teacher checks is operated, for example, by the use of teacher master (test) cards, such cheating becomes pointless. It is also possible to involve older, able children in a non-teacher marking scheme.
- *Teacher monitoring.* When the teacher is absorbed in teaching one group, there is the ever present possibility that children in other groups will opt out of their task and be disruptive. It is important that the teacher stays alert to activity in the unsupervised groups. How the teacher positions him-/herself so as to maintain an overall view of classroom activity, whilst working with a group, can be important.
- *Routine.* Children are most secure when they are sure of what they are to do. A working environment characterised by the regularity of its routines helps in this respect. However, when classroom routines are well established, children often welcome an occasional departure from routine.

Learning in Groups

The characteristic scene in a multi-grade classroom is of the teacher working with a group, whilst other groups pursue different tasks. How the groups are composed and organised for learning depends upon the nature of the subject matter, the teacher's assessment of the group members' abilities, attainments and compatibility, and his/her educational philosophy.

Curriculum subjects differ in the structure of the knowledge they contain. Some subject knowledge has a hierarchical quality which suggests that its teaching should follow a strictly ordered path. Mathematics and the teaching of reading exemplify this - the concept of repeated addition (multiplication) follows on logically from that of simple addition and phonemes are the building bricks required before word construction can begin. Other subjects, such as history and geo-

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Group Work.

graphy, although they, too, have their own concepts, ways of inquiry and forms of knowledge, are much less severely structured. For example, one need not begin the study of history with that of Stone Age Man. Structural differences in curricular subjects can influence how groups are organised for learning. We will now consider four kinds of group.

The sequential learning group

We can use the study of mathematics to illustrate this sort of group. Essentially, the children are required to follow a predetermined and ordered path through sequenced mathematical stages, involving the acquisition, understanding, practice and application of increasingly complex concepts, rules, facts and skills. Logically organised work sheets, exercises and text books, together with appropriate practical equipment, are the essential resources for this kind of group work.

Clearly, the involvement of the teacher in structured work of this kind is critical. How the group is to be formed, organised and taught, represent major professional decisions for the teacher. Here are several questions involved in the decision-making:

- To what extent are the children to be taught in their separate age grades?
- What might the benefits be of forming a larger group of two age grades?
- Are the group members to work individually at their own pace with the teacher giving individual tuition, or are they to be directly taught as a group?
- Might it be possible to divide the group into sub-groups of similar ability, with teacher time shared between the sub-groups?
- What are the resource implications for the approach which is chosen?

Whatever decisions are made, there are advantages and drawbacks. For example, if a single age, mixed ability group is taught instructionally, problems of differences of ability can arise. On the

other hand more able pupils of the same age can be set to help less able peers. If the children are taught in a larger 'double age' group, especially if they work at their own pace, then younger able children need not bump their head on the ceiling of their age group: they can proceed to more advanced work.

Topic Groups

The topic approach fits very well with group work for learning in single subjects which have less formal structures than, say, mathematics. By using carefully chosen themes, children can learn the essentials of a variety of subjects. For example a history study of local change, or a science study of plant growth, besides adding to the children's store of knowledge, can lead them into an understanding of the concepts and ways of inquiry particular to those subjects. Topics are valuable ways of demonstrating how different subjects can be integrated in a coherent whole. A study such as *This Village*, for instance, can draw together a range of subjects including history, geography, language, craft, science and art so that children not only gain a better understanding of where they live, but also how different subjects offer different perspectives upon a single phenomenon.

Topic work allows a teacher to create a variety of ways of working and of forming groups of mixed ability, mixed age and diverse talents. Often, the friendship patterns evident in the peer group can form the basis of group organisation. We will return to the matter of topic work in Chapter 5.

Practice Groups

It is important that pupils are fluent in recognising, recalling and applying the facts, skills, principles and understandings which are integral to a sound grasp of subjects like reading, language and mathematics. Activities such as self-marking exercises, flash cards, structured games and reading, lend themselves to work within a group which is either unsupervised, or overseen by an older pupil. Practice group sessions can be ideally timetabled parallel to a teacher supervised group.

Pupil Interest Groups

When time and resources allow, it is educationally worthwhile to foster the personal interests of children. These can be encouraged by allowing children with similar interests to come together in self-selected groups and by providing them with a regular space in the timetable for them to pursue their interests. Activities may range from the practical to the academic. From them, it is often possible for children to develop a lifelong interest. There is a caution. It is important that interest groups form on a voluntary basis. Children who indicate no desire to join a group should be respected and found alternative occupations.

Independent Working

When children demonstrate their competence to work independently, they should be encouraged to do so. Here we are thinking of children who are capable of using reference books, planning their work, and working towards a finished product. The gathering and recording of local stories serves as an example. Children who are encouraged to work in this way require access not only to

resources, but also to a quiet area where they can work without distraction. When children achieve such a level of competence, they can also be an important support to the teacher with regard to minor clerical tasks, checking figures, preparing village notices and copying and creating work materials.

Physical Arrangements for Group Working

How teachers organise their classrooms depends upon their personal preferences and the furniture and equipment which they have available. If teachers ensure that the arrangement and organisation of the classroom are matched to their methods, learning is enhanced. The following descriptions, together with Figure 1 overleaf, illustrate six arrangements which are appropriate for different group and individual purposes. *Figure 1 does not represent a suggested classroom layout.* Teachers can select from among such arrangements in order to use classroom space in the way which suits their purposes best.

(a) Direct Teaching. The teacher is instructing the class, or demonstrating a technique or experiment. The teacher instructs, explains and questions. The children respond to his questions, and undertake tasks.

(b) The Horseshoe. This can be used for direct teaching, or for teacher led discussion. The arrangement encourages the children to address and question each other as well as the teacher.

(c) Unsupervised cooperative working. The children share a task and cooperate in fulfilling it. The arrangement invites face to face interaction and conversation. It is useful in topic and project work and can be used for shared practice sessions.

(d) The Mat. This is especially useful with younger children for story telling, singing, and news exchanges and for briefing them on their next activity. Sometimes, children like to lie on the mat to read.

(e) Resource/Activity Area. This is an area in which equipment, books, charts and materials can be kept for specific curriculum areas, e.g. mathematics, science, language, art and craft. Often room corners are the best places to site resource areas. Resources can be taken from the area, or a group can work in it.

(f) Independent Study Area. An area of this kind enables pupils to work privately without distraction. It is useful to place the tables and chairs/benches facing a wall. Space in a corridor or on a shaded veranda also makes a good situation for an independent study area.

The flexible use of group arrangements like these depends upon the ease with which they can be reorganised by the children. This requirement means that the tables, desks, chairs, benches and chalkboards should be light enough for the pupils to move without difficulty.

Consideration of those other physical components of classrooms, the walls, should not be neglected. Firstly, displays of children work - stories, poems, and art - are important, because

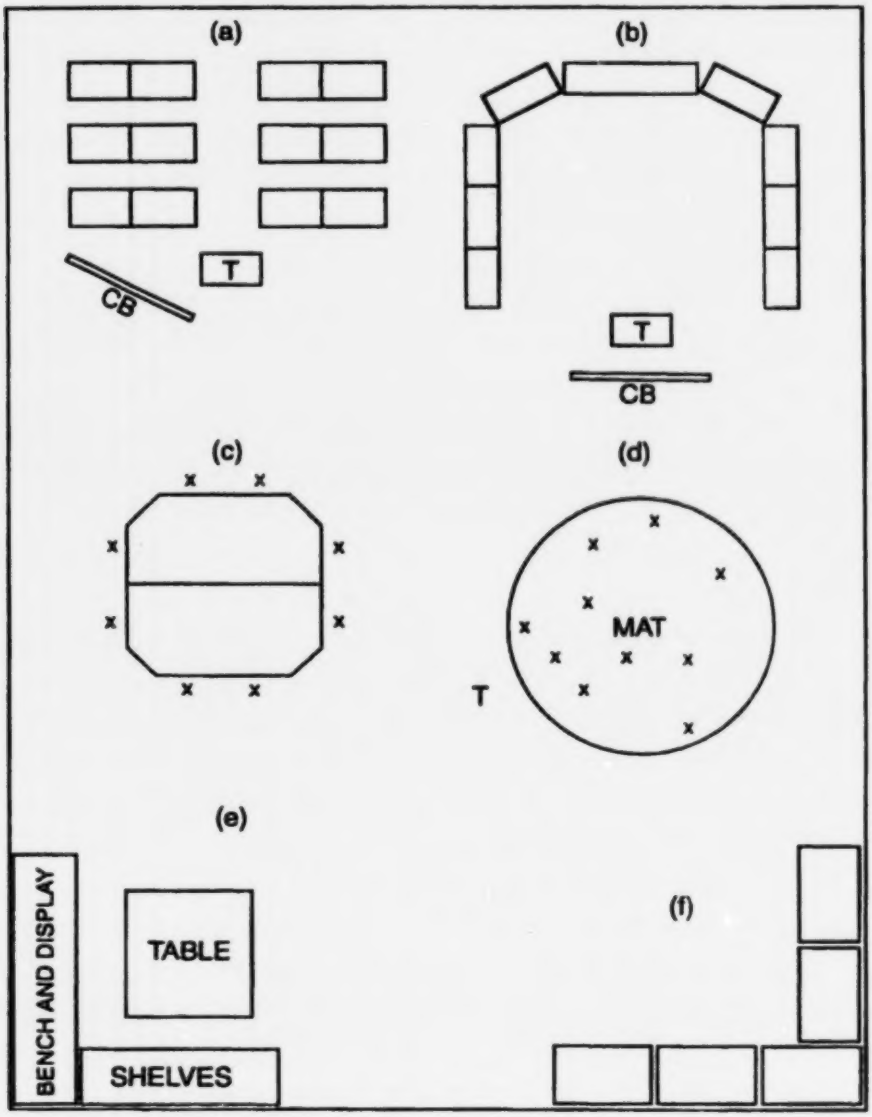
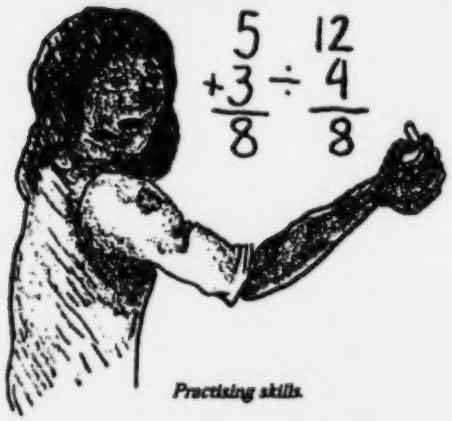


Figure 1. Different ways to use classroom space

they indicate that their efforts are taken seriously. Fibre display boards, or heavy cardboard - anything which will accept a pin - will serve this purpose. On them, a space can be reserved for a notice board to take the timetable, classroom rules, coming events, etc.. If the walls are smooth and chalkboard paint is available, sections at child height can be prepared for the children's use, both inside and outside the classroom/building, e.g. for practice in computation and language and for drawing and design.



Practising skills.

Classroom Support

Although the use of group methods is much more educationally worthwhile than whole class teaching in multi-grade classes, it makes considerable demands upon the teacher. It is therefore important that the teacher makes use of any available assistance. Obviously, if the teacher is able to obtain adult help, the benefits to him/she and the pupils can be substantial, and we will be considering this matter in relation to school-community relationships in the next chapter. We noted in the previous chapter how the peer group can be involved in the organisation and running of the school. In addition, children can be involved in the teaching process as peer tutors, broadly in four ways:

- Children in senior grades teach children in lower grades.
- More able children help less able children in the same grade.
- Older children act as mentors or guides to new school entrants
- Senior pupils supervise practice groups

Carefully used, the practice of peer tutoring frees teacher time. In addition, it can have benefits for the peer tutors themselves. It enables them to practise their recently acquired knowledge and skills, thereby attaining a better grasp themselves. In addition to experiencing responsibility, they can learn to place themselves in the position of the novice learner. It is also the case that slower, or younger learners frequently find it easier to express their difficulties to another child rather than to the teacher. Peer tutoring, whilst a valuable support, should, however, be used carefully. Peer tutors need to have a firm understanding of what they are to teach, whilst the teacher must take care that their use as assistant teachers does not impair their own progress.

In this chapter, we have described a variety of ways of organising children in multi-grade classes so that their learning may be enhanced. These forms of organisation require the teacher to adopt a variety of methods, to think about how the spatial arrangements of the classroom can be put to best use, to assess the possibilities and limitations of their available resources, to consider how additional resources might be gained or created and to reflect upon ways of achieving assistance in the classroom.

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Suggested Activities

1. *Planning the classroom*

If the methods of organising teaching and learning outlined in the chapter are to be used to their best effect, the layout of the classroom needs to provide arrangements of furniture and equipment which harmonise with them. For the purpose of this activity, it is assumed that you intend to incorporate all of these methods into your teaching - whole class teaching, sequential learning groups, practice groups, topic groups, interest groups and independent individual learning. The activity asks you to study your classroom and to plan a layout which would fit well with these methods. As you proceed with the activity, make notes of additional resources which your plan would call for. The following steps and questions provide a frame within which to work:

(i) Draw a scale plan of your classroom and its immediate surroundings, e.g. corridor, veranda, shaded area.
(ii) Mark on your plan doorways, window spaces and fixed items.
(iii) Use your plan to experiment with different classroom layouts in order to find out which best fits your teaching intentions.
(iv) Have questions such as the following in mind as you plan:

- What is the best arrangement for whole class teaching purposes, e.g. when briefing the class, whole class singing and stories?
- What kinds of furniture arrangements are required to accommodate practice groups, cooperative groups (e.g. in art and topic work) direct teaching and teacher led discussion groups?
- Where might accommodation be located for independent individual learning and for pupil interest groups to work?
- How are resources such as reference and reading books, equipment and practice materials to be located so that they can be reached by pupils with minimum disturbance to others?
- Which walls offer the best locations for displaying information boards and pupils' work and for chalkboard areas to be used by the children?
- Which is the most suitable place for messy work, e.g. clay work and painting?
- Where is there a good position for a quiet area, e.g. where children can read privately?
- What is the best place for you to have your personal work place, e.g. for administrative purposes, for teaching individual children and from which to monitor class activity.
- What kind of compromises must be made between your preferred choices because of limitations of classroom space and shape?.

When you have completed your plan, consider the list of the items which changes in your present arrangements would require. How might you obtain them?

Given that you are unable to create the ideal layout which you have planned, which features of it could you achieve in your present circumstances?

Which one of those features do you regard as the easiest one to begin with?

2. Working with groups

A number of different kinds of group were mentioned in the chapter - sequential learning groups, topic groups, practice groups, interest groups. Consider the organisational advantages and disadvantages of each kind of group in turn, in terms of their use in the multi-grade class.

Ability Groups. In which curriculum areas and in what circumstances do you think grouping by ability rather than by age works best? What organisational requirements does such a form of grouping require?

Mixed age groups. What kind of activities do you think work well in mixed age groups? What do you consider to be the main benefits of mixed age groupings (i) from the teacher's point of view and (ii), for the pupils?

Interest groups. If you have had little experience of employing groups in your classroom, a good place to begin is with interest groups - these can be introduced slowly, beginning with just a few children:

(i) From your observations and records, identify a small group of pupils who share an interest.
(ii) Plan a small scale project with them, ensuring that sufficient resources are available.
(iii) Assign a regular time and a place for them to work together.
(iv) Provide unobtrusive help.
(v) Study the reaction of other pupils to the development and invite ideas for further interest groups.

3. *Classroom Support: Peer Tutors*

We noted that group methods make considerable demands on the teacher's time. Any teaching support which the teacher is able to obtain is, therefore, valuable. Whilst it is sometimes possible to obtain occasional adult help in the classroom, the pupil group represents a permanent and readily available source of assistance, for capable pupils can be enrolled as peer tutors. We identified four main ways in which they can help:

(i) Children in senior grades teach children in lower grades.
(ii) More able children help less able children in the same grade.
(iii) Older children act as mentors or guides to new school entrants.
(iv) Senior pupils supervise practice groups.

If you do not already use peer tutors, you may wish to try the following activity:

(i) Select one of the four ways listed above. Identify two or three pupils whom you regard as sufficiently capable.
(ii) Choose an aspect of your work for them to undertake, e.g. hearing children read, supervising practice work.
(iii) Brief them on what they are to do and observe them doing it.
(iv) Discuss the work with them to find out what they find easy and difficult about it and how they think improvements might be made.

CHAPTER FOUR
PARENTS, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: WORKING TOGETHER

In this chapter, we are going to think about the relationship between small schools in sparsely populated areas, parents and communities. Our purpose is to identify a variety of ways in which a small school can develop cooperative relations with parents and the remote community which it serves, in order to enhance both the school and the locality.

At first sight, this idea seems to contain few possibilities. Although most parents are keen for their children to prosper, it is often the case, especially in those rural areas where economic conditions are difficult and education is limited, that parents are unable to see just how they might support the school, beyond ensuring that their children attend and are well behaved. For many parents, the idea that what they know, and can do, could be of any value in the work and life of the school is very difficult to comprehend. That, they may, in fact, have much to offer, is an idea which we can incorporate into our consideration of the community.

- There are five characteristics of small communities, especially those to be found in sparsely populated areas, which are relevant to the matter we are considering:

- *The small size of the community.* It is easy for *all* community members to know each other by name, location and background.

- *Occupation.* In small communities, the work that people do is generally related to a common activity such as farming, fishing, forestry, mining. This means that, as community members, they come together and cooperate in the common routines of everyday work. This is also true of domestic aspects of community life.

- *Kinship.* Small communities commonly contain and emphasise extensive kinship relationships: sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, nephews, nieces.

- *Remoteness.* Distance between settlements tends to result in patterns of friendship being largely contained within the community.

- *Significant figures and influential groups.* Views, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour within communities are often considerably shaped by leaders and sub-groups, e.g. the headman, local political figures or religious groupings.

Even if each of these individual features existed in isolation from each other, they would still remain important aspects of community. But they do not exist separately. Work relationships, kinship relations and friendships all intermingle and overlap to produce

such a web of connections that small communities are often described as being close knit. Whilst conflict, sometimes manifested in family feuds, is to be found in community networks, the core values of small communities, by and large, are those of cooperation, obligation and reciprocity. Moreover, people are often more valued for what they can do than for who they are - what is prized is the contribution the individual can make to communal life e.g. in such areas as work skills, art, music, craft, story-telling, dance, sport, healing and in their understanding of the physical and natural surroundings. Whilst a small community may not be economically and materially well endowed, it may be rich in the variety of talents which it contains. Put another way, each small community has its own particular resource of local knowledge and skills which it draws upon in its daily work, its leisure, its celebrations and its festivals, all of which can be incorporated into the active life of the school.

The School in the Community or The School of the Community?

Sometimes, for example, when a school's relations with its pupils' parents are sour, it can develop a life which is insulated from its village and locality. Often, in such unfortunate circumstances, the school places exclusive emphasis upon its primary function, the transmission of knowledge to its pupils. By so doing, the school stresses its separateness from the life and activity which surrounds it. A school like this we can term *the school in the community*: it is no more than an outpost of the national school system; it does its traditional job, the schooling of the local children, but nothing more.

Many schools, without losing sight of their main purpose, look beyond it and seek to dismantle the invisible barriers which often separate schools from the communities they serve. When a school is successful in doing so, both it and the community are able to cooperate and achieve mutual benefits. In effect, the school ceases to be merely an educational outpost and becomes instead *the school of the community* - a central element in village life.

When people have aspirations for close school-community relations, they usually look towards two beneficial outcomes:

- That *the school* will gain by drawing upon the expertise and talents within the community and its facilities will be improved through combined school-community effort.
- That *the community* will be enhanced, because of the schools's educational output via the children, a community centre will be gained and joint school-community ventures will effect local improvements, both social and physical.

If aspirations like these are to be fulfilled, strategies must be chosen in which the community values of cooperation, reciprocity and obligation - central components of social education - can inform action and the talents of all can be harnessed.

Developing School and Community Relations

There are both formal and informal ways in which productive school-community relations can be developed:

The Formal Ways. Sometimes, the law requires that schools set up parent-teacher committees; often, schools establish them voluntarily. These are valuable ways by which teachers and parent representatives are able to pool information, respond to regional directives, raise funds and plan and implement school improvements. When a a school has a strong *school of the community* perspective, the teaching staff often wish for a different kind of forum, in which membership is widened so that it becomes representative not only of the parents, but of the community as a whole. Frequently the difference is signified by its title such as *Friends of the School* rather than *Parent Teacher Association.* However titled and organised, formal arrangements such as these can be beneficial when large scale activities are attempted, e.g. improvements to the school's playing area, the planning of a village festival.

Whilst committee representatives have a duty to keep all parents informed, it is also important that other conduits exist for the passage of information. Among these are:

- Annual, or twice yearly, individual teacher-parent meetings to discuss their children's progress and problems.
- Established times when parents can see teachers informally.
- Open days when the work of the school is on view.
- School and village notice boards. Maintaining and updating them can be pupil responsibilities.

The Informal Ways. Here are several examples of informal beginnings:

- The teacher makes regular use of the village store, a place where much conversation goes on. She tells the storekeeper what the school is doing and plans to do in the future. In this way, among other things, she is put in touch with a villager knowledgeable in local history matters who has many artifacts. He is keen to bring his historical objects to school and to help with history teaching.

- A teacher makes a practice of walking through the village each week. A casual conversation yields the offer of help with the school music. In a similar way, a French speaker is found who lives close to the school. She offers to come into school each day to teach ten minutes of oral French.

- A head teacher invites the local priest to come to the school on a weekly basis. He does not hold services. He plays a guitar and takes singing lessons. That way he meets children who do not attend his church.

- During a village meeting, the teacher tells of her wish to start a school garden. Next day a villager turns up. He and the children plan and set out the garden.

- A newly appointed head teacher asks a community leader if he will take her to meet the pupils' parents in their homes. A by-product of the visit is several offers of help - to repair equipment, to supervise groups and to take football games.

All those examples are from teachers and head teachers who appreciate the value of the local community network. "Asking around", "Letting it be known...", "Tapping the network", are all expressions which indicate how information, questions and requests can be floated and received. One head teacher of a small school, talking of his attitude to local help said, "This school is like a sponge for soaking up help." It is important that any school with aspirations to become the school of the community also acts like a sponge. Often people are tentative in offering their help to mend, make, clean, coach, assist, demonstrate, listen, escort, referee, teach, and supervise, because they are awed by the prospect of engaging in the educational process alongside a teacher. It is important, therefore, that those who offer their support are, in turn, supported by the school.

Enhancing the School - Enhancing the Community

Up to this point, we have mainly been considering ways in which the community can support the school, thus enhancing the education which the children receive - all the help we have been talking about has been one way - towards the school. Almost always, teachers who experience the benefits of such help feel impelled to do something in return. This feeling of obligation, is often expressed in simple terms, "We get and we give", "They reach in and we reach out", "It's all about giving and receiving."

Such reciprocity by the school can take many forms: helping to organise village events, surveying local needs, recording community history, inviting the community to school plays and other events.

There is another step which small schools can take and that is to develop activities in which the children and community members work together to enhance local life. For example in one community, children and adults cooperated in the making of a village map formed with pictures and stories of past events recalled by community members. In other places the school and community have cooperated to level a play area, to make a village garden, to set up a meeting place for old people, and to fashion materials for pre-school children to use. Activities like these are community enhancing ventures. We will conclude the chapter with an example. Two grandparents, who saw that the old folk dances were being lost, offered to go into school and teach them to the children. When the children had mastered a range of dances, the school invited all the village to a folk dance evening. The teachers, pupils and community members prepared food and set out the school. Local musicians provided the music. On an 'each one teach one' basis, the pupils taught their parents and other community members the old dances. In this way, they enriched the community, not only by providing an enjoyable event, but also by helping to revive an element of village culture which seemed to be in danger of passing away.

Where school and community, pupils, teachers, and community members work together to improve both the school and the community, they are not only fulfilling conscious intentions, they are also learning incidentally about the nature of community life. As Marquand puts it:

Outdoor schooling.

We learn the habits of community by practising them - we become responsible by taking responsibility[1]

[1] Marquand, D. (1990) 'A Language of Community' in Plenlott, B. *et al.* (Ed.) *The Alternative: Politics for a Change*, Allen.

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Suggested Activities

When planning to bring the school and the community closer together, it is a good idea to bear in mind two of the seven principles set out in Chapter 1.

> The teacher does not have a monopoly on knowledge: *lay people with both formal and local knowledge should be drawn into the educational task.*
>
> School and community can generate mutually educative activity: *practical action involving both school and community should be pursued.*

With regard to parental and community involvement with the school, a valuable first step is to review both the formal and informal ways in which you foster good relationships.

1. *Involving the parents and other community members in the school: Formal Ways*
To ensure that your review is comprehensive, it should include both parental and the community opinion and embrace the following elements:

> (i) A listing of the formal arrangements already in place for school-parent-community contact together with the purposes they are designed to serve.
> (ii) Critical consideration of them. How effective are they in meeting their purposes, e.g. to what extent do they (a) enable parents and others to become involved in the school, and (b) inform them adequately about the progress of the pupils?
> (iii) Identification of (a) ways in which the effectiveness of arrangements could be improved and (b), other arrangements which could be introduced.
> (iv) Determination of the means of effecting the necessary changes.

2. *Involving parents and other community members in the school: Informal Ways*
In the chapter we gave examples of how head teachers and teachers disseminated information on the school's plans and activities and sought help from parents and other people in the community by informal, personal means. To what extent do you use such approaches? If you do not, a beginning may be made by identifying natural points of contact within the community and considering how you might use them to draw people into the life of the school.

3. *Enhancing the school*
When local people feel a commitment to 'our' school, they are often prepared to give freely of their time, skills and knowledge to help in its improvement. Not only is it up to the teacher to draw them into the school, but also he/she should be clear on where and how they can help. Identifying and listing both needs and potential sources of assistance constitute a valuable activity. The following provide good starting points:

- Aspects of the school which would benefit from the skills which exist in the community, e.g. repairs to books and equipment, renovations and improvements to classroom facilities.
- Parts of the curriculum in which you would appreciate support, e.g. supervision of practice groups, teaching of crafts, curriculum topics which could be improved by the inclusion of local knowledge and expertise
- Community resources. Think about all the skills, talents and expertise which the community contains. List them in different categories, e.g. occupational, domestic, artistic, sporting. It is important that you cover as many as you can - even those you think may not be not relevant.
- Regular and occasional visitors to the school and community, e.g. health workers, doctors, farming advisers, police.

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On completion of this activity, you can relate the needs listed in (a) and (b) to the list of potential resources identified in (c) and (d). When first involving parents and other community members in the work of the school, it is a good idea:

(i) to focus upon a single aspect of the school,
(ii) to think about how the assistance is to be tapped - formally or informally,
(iii) to reflect upon how volunteers may be helped to make their contribution to the school.

4. *Enhancing the Community.*

There are two main ways in which the school, teacher and pupils, are able to enhance the community:

- By 'giving', e.g. helping to organise events, providing an entertainment, making something for the village.
- By cooperating with the community in order to improve local life in some way, such as compiling a record of local stories, creating a meeting area, organising 'each one teach one' sessions, e.g. in reading.

In community enhancement projects initiated by the school, it is possible for the pupils group to play a leading role. For example the pupils could :

(i) Plan and conduct a community survey on the theme: How can we improve our village?.
(ii) Present the survey results to the community.
(iii) Hold discussions in school and at home to identify something which would add to village life and which, with adult help, it would be possible for them to undertake.
(iv) Solicit community help, plan and implement.

Planning and implementing a community survey, could be a good way for you to initiate a community enhancing venture. Alternatively, you could begin from one of the ideas listed below:

Collecting folk tales - gathering local remedies and cures - gathering opinions on community improvements - reviving old dances - forming a dance group - collecting folk songs - monthly meetings for old people - gathering/disseminating information - producing a monthly news sheet - improving school premises - raising funds and resources for a village project - establishing and equipping a village play and sports area - learning local crafts - adult and pupil reading classes - help and participate in village events - festivals and sports - village and school plays and choirs, football competition - drawing village life with local artists - playgroup for young children - community exhibitions - a pictorial community map - displaying notice board information - creating a youth club - improving a meeting area - making a village garden.

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CHAPTER FIVE
THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT: A RESOURCE FOR LEARNING

No matter where children receive their schooling, whether in city or village, they have two existences - an out-of-school life and an in-school life. In the former, in their home surroundings, children learn from the experiences which constitute the everyday life of their family, friends and neighbours and from the many activities which give form and purpose to local community life. Via the deliberate and incidental teachings of their parents and others, through their own interactions and their explorations of the physical surroundings, they develop many skills and an understanding of their immediate world. Essentially, up to the point of entry to school, they have been learning from an unwritten, local, neighbourhood curriculum, from which they have acquired language skills, traditions, customs, beliefs, and have achieved some grasp of how the social and physical world works. That out-of-school, neighbourhood curriculum will be an alternative source of learning across their school days.

When children begin their in-school life, they meet knowledge in a different form and in different ways. Here are separate parcels of knowledge, each with its own title: mathematics, geography, art, religion, history; all with carefully selected contents of knowledge and skills which are taught systematically, stage by stage and grade by grade. This is the in-school curriculum, an essential requirement if children are to develop a sound understanding of the wider world and of the part which they can play in it.

A difficulty for many children, especially for those who live in remote areas, is that often, the official in-school curriculum does not seem to relate to their experience. The local knowledge they have learned often appears more coherent and meaningful than the school curriculum, with its organised content of facts, processes, theories, experiences, exercises and specialised knowledge. As a consequence, the school curriculum is often perceived by pupils and their parents as irrelevant to their lives and surroundings.

A major problem then, for all teachers, is how they can adapt and relate the in-school curriculum which they teach, to the local social and physical environment. If they can find a way to do it, then both the in-school curriculum, and the informal, out-of-school curriculum can integrate and share the same foundation. One route to a solution is to organise learning activities around specific topics or broader themes rather than around school subjects. Topic and project approaches have grown in popularity over the last few decades as major ways to organise school learning, particularly at the primary stage.

Though the usage of 'topic' may vary as an educational term, it is generally used to refer to an event, historical or contemporary, a physical feature, or a social phenomenon that can easily be identified by the pupils (and their parents) as important or interesting. 'Water', 'Colonial Africa', 'Wild Animals' and 'Moving About' are examples of topics which pupils could undertake. The area of knowledge which a topic focuses on may, of course, be confined to one school subject, but more commonly, material, concepts and ways of proceeding are drawn in from several subjects.

Whereas the term *topic* or *theme* refers to the area of knowledge to be covered, the term *project* indicates the method of study to be employed. In a project, the pupils as individuals or as a group engage in active methods of learning such as observation, interviewing, organising data and preparing a presentation which may include displays, models and reports. Usually, a topic or theme is pursued by means of the project method.

Natural science studies.

Using the Local Environment

The local social and physical environment may be employed as a resource in two main ways:

- The teacher selects an element of the official curriculum, for instance, *weather*, and instead of teaching it as a text book topic, develops a study of local weather, its patterns, how it affects community activity, forms of measurement, weather lore, etc. In that way, it becomes possible to link the phenomenon of local weather to a sector of organised knowledge, the science of weather
- The teacher chooses a topic which can be grounded in local life, e.g. *Myths and Memories in X.* A topic like this places the local people as central, primary sources of information. Besides creating a community archive of stories and descriptions, it offers the opportunity for the children to acquire the skills necessary to gather information, collate and relate it, deal with puzzles and contradictions in it and formulate records. Fed back into the community, the final product adds to the community's store of knowledge.

Because use of the local environment naturally includes local people and their knowledge, it is in line with one of the principles which we outlined in Chapter 1:

> *Lay people with both formal and local knowledge should be drawn into the education task.*

Using the community and its surroundings as a basis for children's learning provides a number of advantages:

- It can help the pupils and others to have a more informed sense of place.
- It demonstrates that aspects of life which are taken for granted are capable of becoming objects of study.
- The products of the pupils' learning can provoke interest and disseminate knowledge beyond the school.
- Local study requires that children learn the attitudes and skills necessary for inquiry. These are useful permanent acquisitions.
- It encourages flexibility in teaching and learning methods. Depending upon the requirements of the study, children can be organised in a variety of ways, e.g. mixed ability, mixed age and specialist groups.
- It provides access to a range of resources including the assets present in the local surroundings and the skills and knowledge within the community.

Making an inventory of resources and possibilities

Clearly, not all the children's learning could, or should, be based upon the local surroundings. Anyone who tried to do that would soon be inventing artificial ways of connecting up local study to the school curriculum. When the decision has been taken to include topics and projects in the work of the school, two initial assessments are requred:

First, consider the potential learning resources which the local environment contains. The people who form the community represent the major assets of local skills, talents and knowledge, e.g. carpenter, storyteller herdsman, mother, priest. Additionally, the locality contains natural and man made features, e.g. plants, trees, animals, rivers, buildings, factories, stores. It is useful to

The local environment.

create an inventory of these assets. At the end of the chapter it is suggested among the activities that you make a beginning by 'brainstorming' (jotting down quickly) any assets you can think of.

Second, examine the headings and contents of the curriculum. Some curriculum subjects fit more readily with locally-based studies than others do, for example, history geography, social studies and science. Such subjects can be good ones to begin with, when introducing studies of the local environment. With your assessment of local assets identified, connections between its contents and elements in the school curriculum are likely to become apparent, e.g. topics such as plants, the family, climate, water, customs, machines.

Which elements in your curriculum suggest themselves as good beginnings for using the local environment? Jot them down.

Planning topic and project work

We have already described topic and project approaches to learning. A topic may have a limited focus, e.g. Making a Map, be of short duration, perhaps no more than two or three weeks, and draw upon one subject area, or several. Where a broader topic theme is selected, e.g. Ways of Moving About, then a larger number of subjects would generally be involved.

Practically, a topic or theme may be organised as a large scale project, or as a number of interrelated sub-projects for different groups of pupils. When the project method is applied to topic work, then more time is required, whilst planning and resources are necessarily more extensive. A good first step is simply to 'brainstorm' around all the possibilities and requirements of the topic. Let us suppose that the chosen topic is *Seeds*:

Brainstorming: *Seed dispersal - birds/animals/wind, farm seeds, wild seeds, seeds in fruits, containers to grow seeds, soil, need magnifying glass, stages of seed growth, drawings - paper, pens etc. Nature Textbooks, charts, cardboard, glue, farm visit, make seed decorations and necklaces, patterns*

in seed, animal food, human food, agricultural officer(?), stories about seeds, graphs, start school garden?, display, talk from farmer?, jars, bowls bottles, help from.....

The next step is to make a list of the potential learning activities within the topic, such as the following:

Make a table garden for growing seeds.
Study and graph germination rates.
Collect plant bearing seeds around the school. Name, compare and contrast ways of seed bearing, growth rates,etc.
Farming and seed cultivation.
Make patterns with seeds.
Colour seeds and make necklaces, etc.
Write stories about how seeds travel.
Seeds as food.
Study the stages of growth in a seed.
Experiments on conditions for growth e.g. moisture, light, air, soil.
Seed dispersal. Study the different methods - wind, water, birds, animals, etc.
Examine fruits as seed containers.
Visit a farm. Talks by farmer, agricultural officer.
Follow seed growth in a crop.
Create a display.

Learning activities such as these, will form the basis of your topic. When all the possibilities have been identified, which you think should be included, the next step is to make your topic plan, in which you define sub-areas and determine the allocation of learning activities to different groups and grades. Here is an example of an outline topic plan designed for a multi-grade class containing six age groups:

Topic: The Study of Seeds and Their Growth
Grades: 1^{st} - 6^{th}
Objective: To study seeds, their growth and how we use them
Allocation of Learning Activities to Groups:

A. 1^{st} - 2^{nd}
Making a table nursery, planting seeds, observing how seeds germinate and grow. Make drawings and simple records. Collect seeds, colour and make seed patterns. Seeds as food, seeds to avoid - gather information. Make charts and simple text and sketch booklets.

B. 3rd - 4th
Experiments on conditions for seed growth, e.g. moisture, light air. Plant different seeds and compare growth rates. Make growth chart. Seed dispersal - study different methods - birds, wind, animals, water, etc. Collect local plants, make a chart of their dispersal methods. Write stories of seeds which travel by different methods. Examine 'seed packing' in fruits.

C. 5th -6th
Study and graph germination rates of different plants and conditions. Collect information on local methods for preparation and seed planting. Seed diseases. Study agricultural leaflets and create a 'best methods' seed cultivation chart. Colour and make seed necklaces, etc.

Subjects involved: The main subject is natural science. Mathematics, language, art and craft and social science are also included.

Method: The children will mainly work in sub-groups within the age bands indicated above. However, other forms of grouping will occasionally be used. Whole class teaching will provide link lessons, there will be class discussions, oral group reports, talks by a farmer and the visiting farm officer. Visits to a farm and to the area around the school will be made.

Product: Drawings, reports, accounts of experiments, stories and a display.

Equipment: As an exercise, go through the topic activities and list some of the resources that you would require if you were setting up this topic.

Possible development Establishing a school garden. Do a farm study.

With formal teacher directed work, lessons and their contents can be strictly controlled with regard to pace, sequence, content and duration. Topic work is different, in that it is much more difficult to estimate how long a lesson period, or, indeed the topic itself will take. It is very common for teachers to operate a traditional subject timetable in the first half of the school day and to undertake topics in the second half (cf. Figure 5, Chapter 6). Because topics and projects include some subjects but not others, it is important that the other subjects do receive their due share of time. Here, it is necessary to keep an account of how much timetable time those subjects not included in the topic have missed so that they can subsequently be compensated. For example, if a history project takes up time allocated to geography and science, then, when the topic is complete, history must disappear from the timetable for a while and those subjects must receive extra attention. It is a good idea, before you start, to make a rough estimate of the time you intend to use from each subject.

This has been a brief consideration of ways in which the local social and natural environment can be integrated into the work of the school. Before concluding the chapter, we will leave you with a summary of questions which need consideration, if a local topic, or project, is to be well planned.

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How do I/we plan for cross curricular local studies?

- What will the children learn through doing this topic - subject knowledge, social skills, cooperation, how to learn?
- Which parts of the curriculum subjects will it combine?
- With different groups, how many starting points are there to be in the topic design?
- What is the duration of the topic to be?
- How will I fit the topic into the school timetable?

Which teaching methods shall I use?

- Which kinds of direct teaching will I employ?
- Which elements of the topic involve *learning by inquiry*?
- Which elements in the topic involve *learning how to inquire?*
- How do I propose to include children's ideas and decisions?

How will I/we provide for the learning?

- What resources will I use? Have I sufficient?
- In what ways shall I organise the children?
- What is the best classroom organisation for the purpose?
- How much of the work is to be done/can be done outside the classroom?
- How are the products of the children's work to be treated, displayed and used?

How can I assess and evaluate the children's learning?

- What will be the foci of evidence gathering, e.g. intellectual aspects, social skills such as cooperation, taking responsibility, demonstrating leadership?
- What kind of evidence can I collect and keep as a record of learning?

Concluding Comments

Preparation for a topic should also include preparation of the children. Very often, a teacher will announce to the class: "We are going to do a topic on X this term." and then implement the plan immediately. As a result, children begin it 'cold', so that their interest in it develops only after it has begun. A worthwhile way to introduce the topic is by raising questions, and introducing relevant objects and pictures to the classroom several weeks before it begins. In that way, the interest of some of the children will already have quickened before the topic starts and their motivation will be increased.

The products of a topic or project can often serve as resources for later pupils to use. Some products are often good enough to be used as they are. Where they need improvement in presentation, a group formed of children with developed talents in writing, art, drawing diagrams and maps, etc., can be given the task of reworking and editing them. Materials fashioned in this way represent not only a useful resource - properly preserved, they become an archive of local knowledge.

On the following page we provide titles of a number of possible topics, together with ideas that could be added to and developed.

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Making Maps
Make a plan of the classroom, school playground.
Using a compass – points of the compass – finding directions, orientating a map.
Using map symbols: draw a rough map of the village.
Introduce measurement and scale.
Make a model of the village.
Create a map game, e.g. 'Find the Treasure' involving directions, distance, symbols, etc.

Shopping at the Store
Make a school shop, price lists, model goods, posters, currency.
Playing storekeeper and customer.
Buying and selling, making out bills.
Profit and loss.
Talk by the local storekeeper.
Make things to sell.
At open day invite local people to see/buy at the shop.

Our ancestors and times before us
Interview older people in the village – parents, grandparents etc.
Record memories of work, play, family and community events, songs, dances, traditions etc.
Make drawings.
Create a play about a famous event.
Form an open day around the play, an exhibition of work and perform songs and dances.

Farming
Work across the seasons.
Crops that are grown.
Keeping crops healthy.
Farm animals, their care and uses.
Tools, their variety and uses. Old tools.
Talks by farmers and agricultural officers.

Trees and Forestry
Identify different trees, draw and title.
Different woods and different uses.
Food from trees.
How animals, birds and insects use trees.
Superstitions and stories about trees.
Talk by forestry officer.

Local Crafts
Using natural materials – pottery, textiles, carvings, mats, furniture.
Identify things that are made within the community. How are they made? From what?
Interview local craft workers, observe demonstrations.
Design and make objects.
Why are the decorations made as they are?

Moving About
How far is it possible to travel in a day?
Distances and speed.
Moving about in water.
Travelling in the air.
Machines that help us to move about.
Ways of moving heavy things.
Friction.

Health and Hygiene
Where do diseases lurk?
How diseases are caught
Clean water and dirty water.
Making water safe.
Rules for cooking safely.
Talks from visiting nurses, health visitors.
Preparing health posters and booklets.

Community
What could we do to improve our village?
Hold group discussions.
Invite community leaders to talk about the community.
Cooperate in planning a survey and interview questionnaire. Compile data and prepare charts, booklets, etc.

Suggested activities

1. *Ideas for Topics*
Set aside a space in your notebook in which to note down ideas for topics which occur to you while you are working through the other activities.

2. *The local environment as a potential learning resource*
If you have completed Activity 3 in Chapter 4, you will have a list of the skills, talents and knowledge which are present in the community. Earlier in this chapter, we suggested that you should compile a similar inventory of all the potential learning assets which the local environment contains. There are two areas on which to focus:

- The local natural and physical environment, e.g. plants, animals, rivers, ponds, swamps rocks.
- The man-made, man-managed environment, e.g. huts, stores, the school, houses, factories, roads, bridges, farm buildings.

When you have compiled full lists of the learning assets which these two aspects of the local environment contain, they, together with the human assets represented by the community, will form a rich collection of resources on which to draw.

3. *A checklist of questions*
The chapter concluded with a list of sixteen questions which can be used both to guide and assess topic planning and implementation. You will have other questions which you believe to be important. Make sure you make a note of them.

4. *Plan a topic*

(i) Select a topic which links aspects of the school curriculum with the local environment

(ii) Brainstorm the topic, listing anything and everything which comes to mind. Continue to add ideas to the resulting list as and when they occur to you.

(iii) Set out your plan using the example given in the chapter:

Topic Title and Area:
Grades:
Objective(s):
Subjects involved:
Allocation of Learning Activities to Grades and Groups:
Methods:
Equipment:
Anticipated Products and Outcomes:
Possible development:
Evaluation:

(iv) Note how you plan to evaluate the topic, e.g. through products, pupil responses to tasks, developments in their capacity to contribute, discuss, work independently and to cooperate, the comments of pupils and adult helpers.

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGIES FOR PLANNING THE CURRICULUM

In school, the learning paths which children are to follow are mapped out in the curriculum, a document which sets out aspirations for schooling, defines what knowledge children are to learn and indicates how it is to be sequenced. In many countries, this document is issued by the national or regional government, whilst in others, it is a local product. Whatever its origins, it is the *official curriculum*. In school, teachers must take the official curriculum, make sense of its intentions, relate its contents to their circumstances and resources, and plan, organise and frame their teaching accordingly. What emerges from this school-based process is the *actual curriculum* - that which is taught and which the children experience. This chapter is concerned with strategies for planning the *actual curriculum*, so that it effectively reflects the intentions and contents of the *official curriculum*.

Commonly, the builders of an official curriculum, after determining what its essential subjects are to be, go on to make decisions about what subject matter will form the teaching and learning contents of the curriculum. In making such judgments, curriculum builders are influenced by what they believe an educated individual should know and what the present and future needs of both national and local society are. With those decisions taken, the matter of sequencing the curriculum content remains outstanding. Here, it is almost always the case that curriculum builders attempt to bring three elements together:

- The nature of the subject matter: abstract/concrete, high/low logical structure, etc.
- Psychological evidence relating to age, ability, maturity levels and learning stages, e.g. what a child should be capable of learning/doing at 7, 8, 9 years of age.
- The commonest form of school organisation in the country or region.

Even when multi-grade schools predominate in a country, the official curriculum can often appear to have been written with large single age grade schools in mind. For example, subject content may be emphatically defined in terms of what must be learned in each grade level. However the official curriculum is determined, teachers in small multi-grade schools must undertake planning, if they are to marry its requirements to their particular circumstances. Although such planning is demanding, it is vital, if the teacher time and resources are to be used to full effect. If long term curriculum planning is not undertaken, or is weak and patchy, then teaching can become 'hand to mouth' and lacking in coherence.

There are a number of matters which teachers need to consider before settling to the task of developing the school's teaching plan from the official curriculum:

- The areas of subject and teaching expertise within the school.
- Subjects, methods and forms of class organisation.
- The age and ability range of the class.

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- The timetable and the allocation of time.
- Local professional help.

We will consider each of these in turn.

The areas of subject and teaching expertise within the school.
Where there are two or more teachers, an assessment can be made of the areas of subject expertise which the teachers possess between them. When these have been identified, the possibilities can be considered of joint staff planning, teachers acting as advisers to each other, limited specialisation, with teachers taking each others classes, and team teaching. For the solitary teacher in a single teacher school, dependent on his/her own resources, the matter becomes one of recognising shortfalls of subject expertise and considering how they can be overcome, e.g. through in-service courses, a colleague at a neighbouring school or a member of the local community. Where no such help is available, then good textbooks and commercially produced curriculum materials, if available, have to constitute the means of support.

Subjects, methods and forms of class organisation.
The solitary teacher in the single teacher school, more than teachers elsewhere, must apportion his/her effort so that each subject receives its fair measure of teacher time. Part of curriculum planning, therefore, is the examination of each subject area to identify which forms of organisation and teacher participation are most appropriate. With that said, the teacher must also ensure that the teaching plan does not result in him/her becoming over-burdened. Part of the planning must be concerned with achieving economies in the use of teacher time. For example, some curriculum areas, such as poetry, music, story telling and literature lend themselves to whole class teaching, if the lesson periods are kept short, the material is carefully chosen and the age range of the class is appropriate. Well carried out, class teaching in such areas is not only economic of teacher time, it can create a sense of whole class participation and enjoyment.

The age and ability range of the class.
Although the development of a curriculum teaching plan needs to proceed on the basis of planning appropriate learning for each grade, it should not then act as a barrier to children who demonstrate their capacity to proceed beyond the level of work deemed suitable for their age, or to combining grades for appropriate areas of learning.

The timetable and the allocation of time.
It is worthwhile considering whether advantages might be gained by varying time table arrangements from term to term. For example, what benefits might be gained by doubling the amount of time spent on history in one term at the expense, say, of geography and compensating the latter subject in the following term. Such a strategy enables the teacher to focus upon fewer subjects across any given term, for instance to take advantage of outdoor learning facilities related to season. In respect of parallel group work, a careful examination of which subjects are best timetabled alongside each other can ensure that best use is made of the teacher and of material resources.

Local professional help.
In addition to assistance at district level, e.g. in the matter of curriculum support materials, the possibility of cooperating with other multi-grade schools need to be considered. This matter will be developed in Chapter 7.

From official curriculum to actual curriculum: Forming a teaching plan
A teacher in a large school, has only the teaching plan for his/her single age grade class to construct. The task of the teacher with a multi-grade class is much more complex, because his/her teaching plan must cover a wider age span. If, for example, the age range of the class is 7-11 years, then the teacher needs to develop a plan with a four year cycle.

Constructing a teaching plan for several years is a complex and time consuming business, not least because of the differences in the structure of curriculum subjects. As we noted in Chapter 3, there are subjects in which, to a large extent, the knowledge content is hierarchical in nature, new elements building upon the understanding of preceding elements. Mathematics provides us with the most obvious example. On the other hand, we have the kind of subjects whose contents are less strictly sequenced, such as social science, art and design and, to some extent, natural science.

The long term planning of the more hierarchical curriculum subjects, need not pose much of a problem. Usually, the structure and sequence presented by the official curriculum, if one exists, or by reputable textbooks, can be adopted almost ready made. The residual problem is that of ensuring the efficient use of pupils learning time (see Chapter 2).

The approach to the planning of work in the less structured subjects depends very much on the methods of teaching which are envisioned. As we have pointed out, these subjects lend themselves much more readily, than do the highly structured subjects, to topic and project approaches.

Planning for multi-grade subject based teaching.
The teacher's life would be much easier, and his/her time conserved, if the subject syllabus could be organised in such a way that the teacher could teach several grades together as a composite group. Figure 2 provides an example of how this can be done in a three grade class.

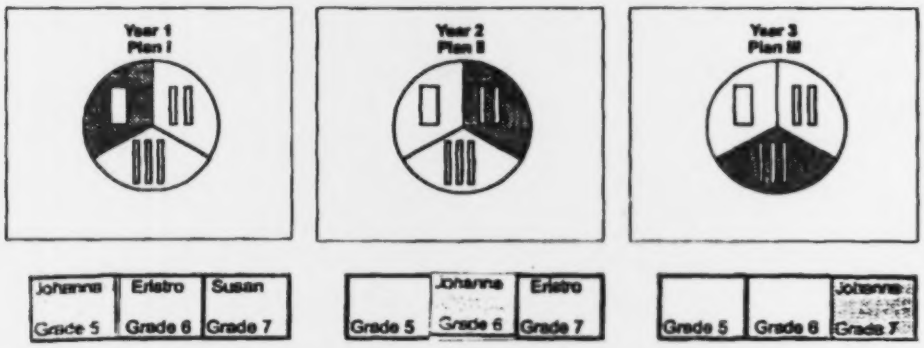

Figure 2. Coverage of subject content in a three grade level class.[1]

Let us assume that the subject is social studies and that the class contains grade levels 5, 6 and 7. For purposes of illustration, the subject elements to be taught, drawn either from the official curriculum, or from grade level textbooks, may be identified as follows:

Grade 5:	Elements	1, 2,	3, 4,	5, 6,	.....
Grade 6:	Elements	a, b,	c, d,	e, f,	.....
Grade 7:	Elements	A, B,	C, D,	E, F,	.....

In order to enable the three grades to be taught as a composite group, the teacher takes curriculum elements which will integrate well from each of the grade levels and forms them into three syllabus plans I, II and III, one for each school year. For instance, Plan I might consist of elements 1, 2 ... from Grade 5, d, f ... from Grade 6 and A, C... from Grade 7, so that about one third of each grade level subject content is included. The teacher then forms the remaining curriculum elements in each of the grades into two further year plans, II and III. In this way, the teacher has established three new year plans, each consisting of content drawn from the subject curriculum and textbooks for all the three grade levels in question. One particular pupil, for instance Johanna in Figure 2, will, over the three years in her class, cover the content of all three grade levels.

When the teacher faces the task of creating a teaching plan, after gathering together curriculum documents, guidelines and relevant textbooks, he or she must decide on a way to make the initial draft plan. Some find it easiest to use a chalkboard in order to sketch out the organisation of subjects and their contents whilst others simply use a note pad. A third method requires a large table and paper labels. The different elements of each curriculum subject are written on to individual paper labels which are then laid out in the order they will be taught grade by grade and term by term. The advantage with this method is that it is possible to see the whole outline of the teaching plan and to move labels in order to achieve the arrangement which best suits the planner's teaching style. (Do not cough when laying out the labels!)

[1] Adapted from Melheim, K. (1998): *Arbeid i flerdelt skule.* (Working in Multi-graded Schools.) Oslo: Samlaget, pp. 106-109.

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We have exemplified the principle for a three grade class. It can, of course, apply to classes with any number of grades.

Planning for topic/project based approaches.

We have already observed that topic and/or project work is an important approach to learning, and that it is readily adaptable and valuable to rural settings and multi-grade schools. It is the case, however, that planning for topics and projects often requires more planning than do traditional subject teaching methods. The following closely connected decisions have to be taken at an early stage in the planning process:

- Which topics/themes/projects may be identified over the planning period, e. g. over the three year cycle of a three grade class?
- Which subjects, or parts of subject syllabuses, should be covered through topic/project work?
- How much of the total teaching time should be devoted to such cross-subject approaches?

A "topic time line", like that in Figure 3, enables judgments to be made about the order and timing of topics in relation to the rest of the teaching plan and to local seasonal conditions, community events, festivals, etc.. With the time line of topics and projects complete across the teaching plan cycle, it is possible to see the range and balance of the topics which pupils will experience during their time in the class.

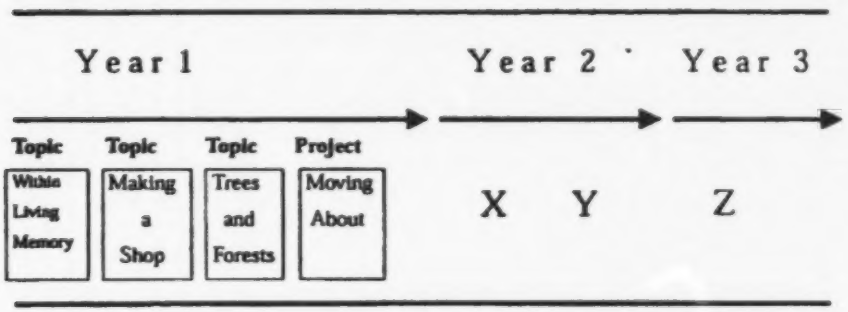

Figure 3. A topic time line for a three year planning cycle.

The teaching plan is not the place to develop complete topic/project plans. However, it is the place to begin their preparation by including outlines of each of the selected topics/projects. A simple way to do this is to use planning stars like that in Figure 4. Initial ideas are entered on the outline and, over time, when ideas come to mind, they, too, can be included. In this way, when the appropriate time comes for detailed planning, a range of possible areas and activities already exists.

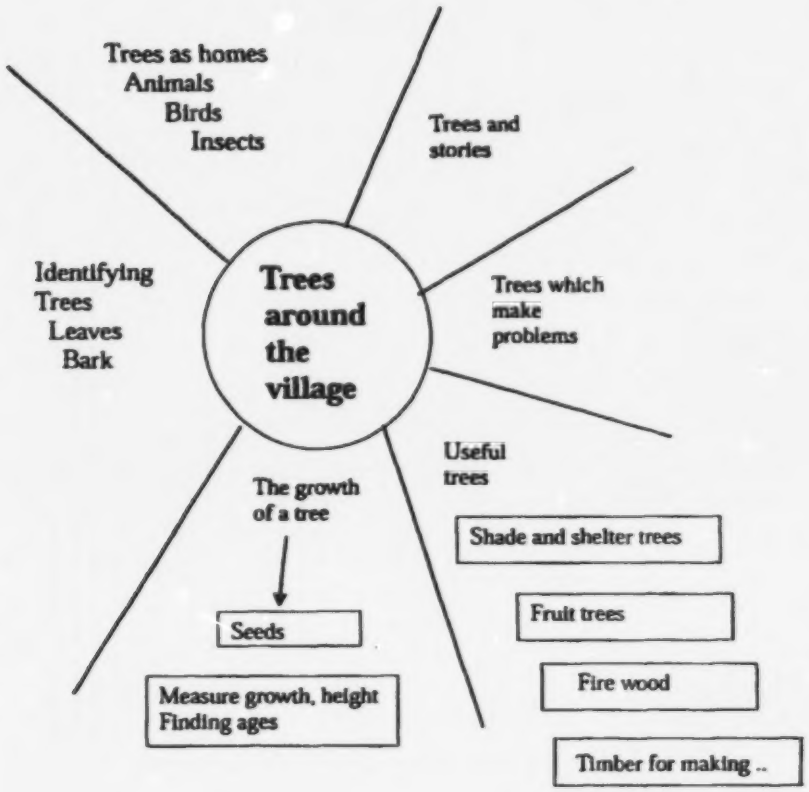

Figure 4. A Topic Planning Star.

A specific topic, such as that portrayed in Figure 4, may, to varying degrees, cover materials or elements from across the school curriculum. For example, the "Trees Around the Village" topic would be specifically based in natural science and geography, but it might also cover elements of social science, language (and culture), and even mathematics.

The actual arrangement of the timetable for a specific school week will depend on the extent to which time, normally devoted to subject contents, is allocated to topic/project work. Figure 5 is an example of a school week in which subject time has been reduced to less than half of the school timetable in favour of topic work. This kind of arrangement allows for greater flexibility in the use of time. It is, of course, the responsibility of the teacher to see that over the course of a term or year, the amount of time each subject receives is generally in line with that indicated by the official curriculum.

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Lesson	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Topic	Mother t.	English	Social stud.	Religion
2	- " -	- " -	Crafts	Maths	English l.
3	- " -	Maths	- " -	Other subj.	- " -
4	- " -	Topic	Topic	Topic	Topic
5	- " -	- " -	- " -	- " -	- " -
6	Maths	- " -	Nat. science	- " -	- " -

Figure 5. An illustration of a week's timetable arranged for topic work.

Different Models for Different Lessons

How the teacher organises the learning periods and lessons, through which the teaching plan is realised in action, depends upon the nature of the subject matter involved and the age grades and ability levels in the class. For example, when subject content is strongly sequential in character, as in mathematics and language, then direct teaching is a prime requirement and teaching within age grades or ability groups may be favoured. Less strongly sequenced subjects, on the other hand, can make use of methods involving more indirect teaching, pupil-centred learning and mixed age and ability groups. The two models set out in Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the two approaches:

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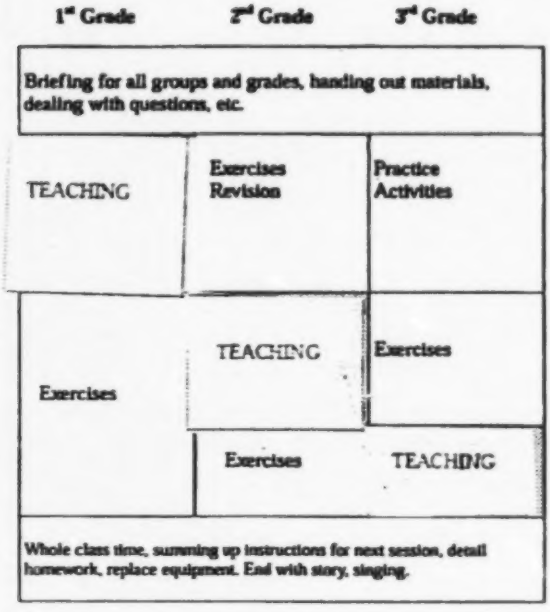

Figure 6. Model of teacher directed session.

When following this first model, the teacher first briefs all the grades on what they are to do, where they are to obtain help e.g. peer tutors, and what they may do on task completion. In the main body of the session, the teacher's input is strategically placed and timed to provide direct teaching for each of the grades in turn, whilst the others independently work on activities and exercises. The session is completed with a brief period of class time to sum up, issue instructions, detail homework, replace equipment and perhaps, some singing, a story or a poem.

The second model is different from the previous teacher directed model, for it emphasises independent and cooperative group work and the need for children to take charge of their own learning. Pupil centred in character, it is very appropriate for topic and project work.

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Briefing and discussion on work and progress so far in the topic/project. Clarifying tasks and activities, group arrangements, etc.		
Group A	Group B	Group C
Gathering information organising it into booklet	Planning organising building a model	Designing drawing illustrating a frieze
Groups describing what they have done, offering ideas raising questions. Planning for next topic session.		

Figure 7 Model of a pupil centred session.

Typically, within this model, the introduction is used to brief the whole class so that they are aware of how each group is contributing to the whole topic and to ensure that groups and individuals are clear about the work they are undertaking. In the body of the lesson period, different groups and individuals pursue their tasks without direct teacher involvement. The teacher has a facilitating role, advising, helping to solve problems and providing incidental teaching. At the end of the session, it is important that the groups have the opportunity to describe and show what they have been doing, so that everyone is able to gain an overall grasp of the topic's progress.

These two models, of course, can be adapted and modified to suit differing circumstances and teaching. It is possible, to form a model which incorporates elements from both the direct teaching, and the pupil centred model where a teacher perceives that advantages can be gained by doing so.

In this chapter, we have considered how the contents of the official curriculum may be taken and organised into a comprehensive teaching plan for a multi-grade class. In addition, we have described how plans for local studies in the form of topics and projects can be organised to cover the age span of the multi-grade class. We concluded with descriptions of two models of organising teaching and learning which, adapted to local circumstances, could underpin teacher centred and child centred approaches.

Suggested Activities

1. Planning the Multi-Grade Curriculum

We outlined in the chapter two ways of laying out a curriculum or teaching plan for the whole age range of a multi-grade class (using chalkboard or paper labels). Additionally, we indicated how curriculum elements which integrate well can be drawn from each age grade syllabus and combined into common syllabuses, thus allowing different age grades to learn together.

The planning task which is entailed in drawing up a curriculum plan for the whole school cannot be accomplished in an hour or an afternoon! It is, however one of the most important tasks for a teacher to undertake and is best reserved for a holiday period.

2. Planning for topic/project based approaches

It is a good idea to set aside a section in your notebook for the outline planning of topics. The work can done in two stages:

(i) Make a topic time line to cover the age range of the class like the one set out in Figure 3. There are three things to bear in mind when you are planning the time line:

- The topic time line which you create should be organised in such a way that it 'marries' with your overall curriculum plan.
- The arrangement of the topics should ensure a balance between the subject areas which they emphasise, e.g. it would be bad practice for a series of history based topics to follow one another to the exclusion of topics based upon other curriculum areas
- Topics can appear several times in a time line. For example, a topic such as *Moving About* may appear several times, emphasising a different aspect each time, e.g. *Moving about the Village, Moving about the World, Moving about in Space.*

(ii) Make Topic Planning Stars. Once you have completed your topic time line, it is possible to make a topic planning star like the one exemplified in Figure 4 for each of your selected topics. These are useful for recording ideas as they occur to you, e.g. elements which you encounter in the local environment, so that when the time comes to plan a particular topic in detail, you already have a range of ideas which can be incorporated..

3. Teacher Directed and Pupil Centred Sessions

Models of these ways of organising teaching and learning are set out in Figures 6 and 7.
If you are unfamiliar with either or both of them, it is important that you gain experience of their use gradually. Let us suppose that you planned to familiarise yourself with the use of the pupil centred model portrayed in Figure 7:

(i) Plan a small scale topic which would last five or six sessions and which would contain three or four different, parallel activities, e.g. modelling, painting, book research, story writing and illustrating.
(ii) Familiarise each of the groups separately with what they are to do before embarking on a session involving several group tasks
(iii) Confine the activity to one session a week, following the outline given in the model
(iv) If possible, involve two or three adult helpers.
(v) Evaluate your trial, before extending your use of the approach.

The same approach can be adopted for trialling the Teacher Directed Model, e.g. you could use it on one morning a week at first. It is especially useful if the children have been previously trained to use practice materials, to work independently, and also understand the rules governing access to materials and to the teacher and others, e.g. senior pupils and adult helpers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: COOPERATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN SCHOOLS

How am I doing? That question is never far from the minds of teachers who wish to do their job well. It is a hard question for any teacher to answer, and it is particularly difficult for teachers who, for one reason or another, have few possibilities of judging their performance against that of fellow practitioners, or of engaging day to day in professional conversations. The principal danger, when teachers cannot obtain feedback on their work, or have little access to fresh thinking, is that they will give up on the question and allow their practice to settle into an unthinking routine. If that should occur, then their classroom can become like a stagnant pool, dull and lacking vitality. That possibility is what underlies the fear of education officers with respect to teachers in remote small schools, namely, that their circumstances will create professional isolation and resistance to change, so that their pupils will be disadvantaged educationally. The danger of such isolation was amply demonstrated in a study of rural schools in Northern Norway.[1] This chapter attempts to consider how teachers in remote schools can achieve answers not only to the question "How am I doing?", but also to a second, "How is our school doing?" We will begin by considering the kind of professional development which can occur within school.

Professional Development Within School

The Reflective Teacher.

The reflective teacher is one who thinks a good deal about what his/her work in the classroom, what kind of effect it seems to have, how it might be improved and what fresh ideas might be introduced. He/she carries out such reflective activity at all sorts of times - walking home at the end of the school day, gardening, doing routine chores. Reflective teachers can often be regarded by their family and friends as absent-minded. So long as they maintain their curiosity about their teaching, reflect and act upon their conclusions, it is unlikely that their classroom will stagnate.

Being reflective about one's teaching is the first step to adding another dimension to it. When a teacher thinks systematically about an aspect of his/her teaching, carefully develops changes based upon that thinking and evaluates the effects, he/she is adding a research aspect to his/her role. Clearly, it is important for all teachers to adopt a reflective approach to their teaching. There is a further possibility. Where the staff of a school behaves in that way collectively, then a sound foundation can be established. Within a reflective school of this kind, both the professional development of the individual teachers and improvement of the school become possible.

1) Solstad K.J. (1997): *Equity at Risk. Planned Educational Change in Norway: Pitfalls and Progress.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

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Towards the reflective school.

Our concern in this book, is with the small multi-grade school. Where its staff consists of several teachers, it is advantageously placed for developing a reflective perspective on development. First, the organisation of the school is much less complex than that of the large school and, because the head teacher is also a classroom practitioner, he/she can not only lead, but also experience, the action of implementation. Second, the number of people, teachers and pupils, involved in the developmental activity is limited. Because the teaching staff is small, planning and implementation can be much less time consuming than in a large school, where the agreements of different groups and factions must be sought. Third, because it is possible for a remote school to have more direct contact with its community, it is sometimes possible to engage some of its members in both the action and the evaluation of effects.

Development in the reflective school naturally begins from the professional interests and problems of the teachers. Because the teachers are few in number, they may already have identified, via their informal conversations, those aspects of their teaching and of the school which require attention. It is from that kind of informal agenda that a starting point can be chosen. This is the 'What' part of the process. It is important that nothing is rejected because it appears trivial. Where people are uncertain about committing themselves to development activity, some relatively unimportant small scale feature can prove to be a good starting point and may generate the confidence to proceed to more ambitious ventures. What is vital is that the selected element represents a shared concern or idea – e.g. the introduction of team teaching in a two or three teacher school.

The next step is to formulate the developmental process - the "How" of the activity. Throughout, it is important that participants develop a sense of shared ownership. Here, the sensitivity of the head teacher as leader is very important in terms of ensuring that the contributions of all participants figure in the plan. As with designing a topic/project, an initial brainstorming session can generate a pool of ideas, which subsequently fuels the planning of each stage of the development. Once implementation has begun, it is crucial that the cycle of reflective teaching - planning, implementation, observation of action and effect, reflection, new planning - is maintained both individually and collectively by the participant teachers.

Evaluation, too, is part of the reflective process, which should draw upon both the material products and the experience of all participants during the developmental activity and when it is finished. Where possible, evidence should be gathered from people who may not be participants in the project but, being on the sidelines, are able to observe its effects, e.g. members of the community.

Professional Development Between Schools

The single teacher school can only be a reflective school to the extent that its teacher possesses the necessary qualities to analyse his/her work in order to improve it. Given that he/she is a sole practitioner, he/she must look outwards to neighbouring schools in order to achieve professional contact. In the last twenty years, there has been increasing recognition of the need for teachers in small remote schools to develop forms of contact with teachers in similar schools, in order to

exchange information, identify common concerns and problems and cooperate in developing solutions to them. As a result, small schools by themselves, but more often with the help of local education officers, have formed school clusters containing several schools. These clusters, in turn, often integrate into larger networks.

Where schools are not at great distances from each other, it is relatively easy for them to form a cluster and for the teachers from each school to meet frequently. Where schools are widely

In-service training.

dispersed, it is more difficult, but not necessarily impossible, for them to develop links. If small schools are to develop clustering arrangements, there are certain requirements:

- Often schools have developed informal relationships which can form a sound basis for clustering. Any official plan to cluster schools should avoid the disruption of pre-existing relationships between schools.
- School clustering means that meetings between teachers from different schools must be facilitated. Where schools are widely dispersed, time, resources and money must be allocated in the school year for teachers to meet.
- School clusters can perform two professional functions. On the one hand, they can create gatherings at which local education officers deal with their official priorities. On the other hand, they can act as forums in which teachers identify their pressing problems and plan joint solutions. Although both are important, it is the latter which is the prime reason for a cluster's existence and which provides its members with a sense of ownership.
- The first purpose of a cluster is that of providing isolated teachers with the opportunity to talk to each other. However, if it is to be more than a talk shop, it is important for cluster meetings to work to an agenda. The agenda should fairly represent the concerns of all participants.
- Clusters are places where both head teachers and class teachers come together to engage

cooperatively. Where distinctions of status are made, it is easy for teachers to regard a cluster as no more than a head teachers' club.

- If school clusters are regarded as an important part of educational activity, then that must be signalled to teachers in terms of the support which clusters receive.
- Developing activity within and between clusters requires coordination. Commonly, this is achieved by appointing a coordinator, often from one of the schools.

In essence, school clusters in remote areas have four main aims:

1. To overcome the isolation which their teachers can experience,
2. to amplify the range of expertise at their disposal,
3. to provide a means of establishing common interests and needs, and,
4. to foster cooperation.

In any school development project, whether within, or between schools, there are certain essential components. These mirror much that has been discussed in this chapter and so we will conclude with a summary of them:

- Which areas should I/we focus on in order to improve my/our teaching/ this school? Here reflection is directed towards an analysis of the teacher's and the school's needs, e.g. better teaching aids, enhancing the teaching of children with special needs, developing more open methods, achieving management efficiency, involving the community more directly.
- Which one should we choose as a beginning? The choice may not be that which appears to have the greatest priority, but rather the one which has greatest likelihood of success so that the participants gain in confidence.
- Who leads? Commonly it is assumed that the head teacher will lead. This need not necessarily be the case. One of the teachers with greater expertise in the selected area may be better qualified to do so.
- What is the decision making to be like?
- Who are the main participants in the project - all the teachers, all the children, some of the children? Who have marginal involvement?
- What kinds of external support is required to act in advisory and critical capacities?
- What are the stages to be ?
- What are we prepared to accept as criteria of achievement?
- What resources are required (a) materially, (b) professionally, (c) locally?
- How are we to maintain evaluation across the project. How do we assess it on completion?
- With whom do we share the lessons which the experience has taught us?
- How do we prevent ourselves from sliding back into old ways?

This concluding chapter has been concerned, first, with ways in which the teacher in the small school situation can draw upon their own reflections to create systematic improvements in the school and, second, with the possibilities inherent in inter-school cooperation. As we stated in the introduction, a first intention was to create a concise handbook. Whilst that intention has resulted in a book which can be read through quickly, the number of developmental possibilities which it contains may leave the busy teacher breathless at the prospect of attempting them. We end the book with the caution we made at the beginning: Go slowly and reflectively, one careful step at a time.

Good wishes to you personally, your pupils and your community in all your endeavours.

Suggested Activities

1. *Doing something about the problem of evaluation in small schools*

In the chapter, we noted that, because a small school inevitably has a small staff, it is at a disadvantage when it comes to evaluating a new development, for at most, there may only be two or three teachers to pool their impressions and ideas. That disadvantage is most apparent in the single teacher school. The practical problem in such circumstances, is how to obtain information which can complement their own evaluation and assessments. The following questions focus on the problem:

- Pupils experience the classroom and developmental change very differently from the teacher. To what extent, and in what ways, do you feel it possible to involve them in the process of evaluation?
- If parents and other community members participate in the work of your school, how might it be possible to derive feedback from them on any development which you are undertaking?
- What professional reservations do you feel about using lay people as sources of evaluation?
- Which limited area might serve as a trial?

2. Turning reflective thinking into classroom action

We characterised the reflective teacher as one who spends much time in his/her own head, thinking about aspects of his/her teaching and the school, e.g. a slight worry about behaviour in the school, a different way to organise the pupils. When teachers are able to share their thinking with each other, the foundation for school improvement has already been laid. The steps for turning personal thinking into planned, collective action are as follows:

(i) Face the What question by pooling all the individual concerns and ideas for improvement and forming them into an agenda.
(ii) Study the agenda and <u>together</u> select an item - preferably practical and small scale.
(iii) Move to the How question. Brainstorm ideas together and note all the possibilities.
(iv) Form a joint plan of action, setting down all the stages which are to be taken, along with the necessary equipment and materials which the plan calls for.
(v) Implement. Share thinking and experience during and at the end of each stage.
(vi) Collectively assess the change or improvement which has been brought about and determine whether it has 'taken' i.e. it has acquired permanence.

Remember the developmental cycle - share reflections - select the What - plan the How - implement the action - observe action and effect - share reflections -

3. Professional Development Between Schools

As we have noted, where small schools are sufficiently close for their staffs to meet, it is possible for them to share ideas and problems and to cooperate in various ways. Among the practical activities in which clusters can engage are: developing curriculum and topic plans together, producing materials,

giving short talks, e.g. How I teach X. Even when schools are too far away from each other, it is often possible for them to establish a partnership, find ways of exchanging information, and work on shared tasks. This activity asks you to think about how you might be able to develop and use cooperative links with other schools.

- Are there schools with which you could make contact once a month, once a term, at the end of a school year?
- How could that contact be achieved, e.g. what provision might it be necessary for local education officials to make so that you were able to link with other schools?
- If meetings were possible, what purposes would you wish them to serve?
- How could contact be maintained between meetings?

Making Small Schools Work takes, as its central concern, the provision of an equitable basic education in rural areas by means of small schools located close to the homes of the pupils. Whilst the book deals with those characteristics of small schools and their relationships with the communities they serve, wherever they are located, particular reference is made to the circumstances of rural areas in developing countries. The competent and imaginative small school, with only one or two teachers, applying effective multi-grade teaching methods, is seen as a vital element in the struggle for universal literacy and the all round development of girls and boys growing up in remote areas, and in the well-being of their communities.

The aim of the book is to stimulate rural teachers both to adopd and develop ideas and methods of teaching and learning which will enable them to reap the benefits of the educational advantages which small schools and their communities offer, and to meet the challenges which their size, location and circumstances present.

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